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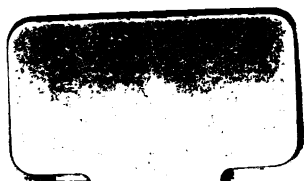
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EXPOSITION
OF THE
PARABLES

LONSDALE.



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EXPOSITION
OF
THE PARABLES:

**INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR THE USE OF TEACHERS
IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.**

BY
THE REV. JOHN G. LONSDALE, M.A.
READER AT THE TEMPLE CHURCH,
AND SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE
EDUCATION OF THE POOR.

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PREFACE.

THE object of this little book is to give a short and familiar explanation of the Parables of our Blessed Lord. As is stated in the Title, it was mainly written for the use of Teachers in Elementary Schools, particularly those in Sunday Schools, with whom the want of a simple exposition of the Parables, such as they may render in their own language to their Scholars, has been often felt. It is hoped that to other persons also the book may not be without use.

The plan which has been adopted is to state shortly the occasion on which each Parable was delivered, as in many of them this will be found to bear materially on the lesson intended to be taught; to give an explanation of every difficult word or expression in the Parable itself; and to add some practical remarks on the moral to be drawn from it.

The various explanations offered of several of the Parables have not been discussed; that interpretation which seemed on the whole to be preferred has been alone given. The practical remarks have been confined as much as possible to *a single, definite* point, as the writer is of opinion that the Divine Author of the Parables intended that one simple truth should be enforced by each—not that two or three distinct lessons should be drawn from it. It is hoped that the moral selected in each case will be found such as writers of repute have sanctioned.

It remains only to add that any attempt to derive instruction from the terms or expressions used in the Parables themselves has been carefully avoided. These, the writer conceives, were introduced merely to give a completeness and unity to the narrative, and afford no warrant for the many ingenious, though for the most part fanciful and far-fetched, meanings attached to them.

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EXPOSITION OF THE PARABLES.

THE SOWER AND THE SEED.

MATT. xiii. 3—9. MARK iv. 3—8. LUKE viii. 5—8.

THIS parable is thus given by the three Evangelists:—

MATT.

Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: but other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

MARK.

Behold, there went out a sower to sow: and it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

LUKE.

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

This parable, according to St. Matthew and St. Mark, was delivered by our Lord while sitting in a ship on the sea of Tiberias, in the hearing of the multitude who were gathered together on the shore. St. Luke merely states that it was spoken 'when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city;' but he does not record the particular occasion or locality.

The words of the narrative are so clear, that they require no comment; more especially as this is one of the three parables of which our Lord was pleased himself to give the explanation to his disciples in private. This interpretation as given by the three Evangelists, varies in some minute particulars; but in the main, as will be seen, they all agree.

MATT. xiii. 18—23.

MARK iv. 14—20.

LUKE viii. 11—15.

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation

The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: after that, when affliction

Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and

or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things enter in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

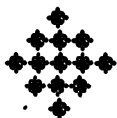
are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The parable of the Sower and the Seed, is the first, and also the simplest of all our Lord's parables. It is designed to represent the different dispositions with which men receive the word of God, and the different results which, in each case, are produced by it. The interpretation, as given by our Lord himself, does not enter into the question why the world is so ordered that, in the case of one man the word falls on a hard and impenetrable heart; why with another it fails of effect in the hour of temptation; why with a third it is rendered unfruitful through the cares and pleasures of this life; why with a fourth it falls into an honest and good heart, and yields a crop unto perfection. The parable and the explanation of it merely state the fact; a fact to which daily experience bears witness, that these

various results are seen, while in each case the same seed is sown, the same word of God preached. It will however be remarked, that in the three characters first represented, differing as they do in the causes which operate in each several case, the result is in the end the same. They bring forth no fruit; or, what is the same thing in effect, no fruit to perfection. For what does it matter, whether the seed never takes root, or whether it withers and dies before its shoots come into the full ear? is not the servant equally unprofitable, who never takes in hand his master's work, or who having begun it leaves it in an unfinished, and therefore useless, condition? In the last instance alone is the good soil found which brings forth such a crop as the sower of the seed has a right to expect. There alone is the honest and good heart, which not only welcomes the word, and warmly entertains it, but also with patience keeps it, until in due season it brings forth its natural result, a rich harvest of holy and Christian works. And is not this painful truth thus brought home that 'many are called, but few chosen?' Are not those who receive with gladness and carefully cultivate the opportunities of improvement afforded to them, few and rarely to be found in comparison with those who fail to profit by these same privileges, though liberally offered to them? Are there not many who all their lives long remain utterly callous and insensible to the powerful motives set forth in the word of God; in whose heart no sympathy is aroused, no warmth is kindled—from

whom not even a spark of feeling is elicited when the mercies and love of Christ are set before them? Are there not many, represented by the seed sown in stony places, who have no fixed or settled principle; who profess an adherence to the Gospel, because it seems to promise an easy and smooth path, but find themselves altogether unprepared to encounter the difficulties which actually stand in the way of a faithful fulfilment of its requirements? Are not those too a numerous class, figured by the seed sown among thorns, who try to reconcile the interests of this present life with those of eternity; who vainly suppose they can serve both God and Mammon; and who fail to see, till too late, that, in fact, the attractions of the world wholly absorb their attention, and have unspiritualized their thoughts and affections? And is it not a sad truth that, amidst these various kinds of unproductive soil, the good ground is comparatively scarce? Is it not the case, that few in proportion to the whole number of men to whom the word of God is offered, so discipline their thoughts and desires, as to see clearly and appreciate thoroughly, the value of the privilege set before them? ‘He that hath ears to hear let him hear’ is the earnest and well-timed caution with which our Lord concluded this parable. If the many and various hindrances which stand in the way of a right and honest reception of the word of God be thus clearly pointed out by him who knew what was in man, who can hope to escape condemnation if he takes no heed to the warnings mercifully

vouchsafed? Who can hope to bring forth fruit to perfection if he be content to live like the majority of the world? Who can look forward to produce evidences of the truth and sincerity of his Christian conversation, unless, in opposition to the mass of those around him, he let patience have her perfect work; and amidst the carelessness of a thoughtless world—amidst the trials of life, its cares and pleasures, in an honest and good heart, keep the word which he has heard?



THE TARES.

MATT. xiii. 24—30.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

THIS parable, which is found only in St. Matthew's Gospel, was delivered on the same occasion as that of the Sower and the Seed, and was afterwards interpreted by our Lord in private to his disciples at their request.

25. *While men slept.* This expression only means that the enemy took the opportunity of doing this mischief in secret, and when he was not likely to be observed.

Tares. The word here rendered 'tares' is a weed called *zizan*, which, especially when it first appears above ground, bears a close resemblance to the wheat plant.

26. *Then appeared the tares also.* When the wheat

was on the point of shooting into ear, then the difference was made manifest between it and the tares or zizan, which contained no blade from which ears could spring.

29. *Lest ye root up also the wheat with them.* The wheat and the tares grew so close together, that it would be next to impossible to pluck up the one without disturbing and injuring the other.

This parable was interpreted by our Lord to his disciples in the following words:—

MATT. xiii. 37—43.

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

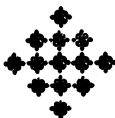
The truth that in this world evil will be always mixed with good, needed no parable to make it plain. The experience of all men in every age puts this fact beyond a doubt. But that in the kingdom of heaven,—that kingdom which though set up on earth, was not of the earth, earthy, but of heaven,—in the kingdom of Christ itself, good and evil should be found side by side to the end of time, was a state of things very different from that which the first disciples expected. It is an objection often raised, even at the

present day, against Christianity, that many profess its tenets who do not live up to its principles, and that multitudes lay claim to its privileges who are little better than hypocrites. Why, then, it is asked, are such inconsistencies allowed to exist? Can this, it is urged, be really the church of that God, 'who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,' in which evil is permitted to remain, and yet no brand or mark of disgrace placed upon it? Can this be the true body of the one holy God, which does not even profess to be perfect and without spot? The parable of the Tares was intended as a clear anticipation of these objections, and a direct contradiction to the expectations of those who venture to think that the Church of Christ, so long as the period of her probation on earth continues, will ever become perfectly holy or entirely without blemish. In that Church, almost immediately after our Lord's ascension, the mixture of evil with good appeared. Such has been its condition for more than eighteen hundred years, and such it will continue to be until the Church militant be merged in the Church triumphant. And while such is God's economy it is useless, or rather we may say presumptuous, to attempt to alter it. The holy and the unholy, the real and the untrue, the earnest and the irresolute, the sincere and the hypocrite, are mingled together on every side. All of these alike claim to be members of the Church of Christ; all who have been baptized into his name take to themselves the title and the privileges of

Christians. And if any man, or any body of men, were to attempt to draw the line between the real and the nominal disciples of the Saviour, can there be a moment's doubt that, in many cases, they would pluck up the wheat with the tares? Would not he who talks loudly of his religious experience, and under this 'same confident boasting' conceals a worldly or self-sufficient spirit, be likely to be mistaken for the true follower of the cross of Christ? Would not the humble, and modest, and retiring disciple be sometimes classed among the indolent and indifferent? Would not ostentatious display oftentimes pass current for self-denial? Might not humility be set down as weakness, generosity as love of praise, and charitable toleration as utter indifference to error? It is God alone who knoweth the hearts, God alone who can decide between the tares and the wheat, the hypocritical professor, and the sincere believer.

It may, however, be thought that it would have been well if the Great Head of the Church had, in this respect, ordered things differently, and had given an infallible power to men to discern between good and evil. What, however, would be the consequence? Would not the true servants of Christ be inclined to shun the company of the hypocrites? would they not dread intercourse with them? And thus many opportunities of applying the influence of good example, the which now happily exist, would be almost entirely lost. Thus there would be no occasions, as there are at present, on which the lukewarm and the indifferent

disciple might witness sacrifices readily made, hardships cheerfully endured, temptations manfully resisted, injuries meekly forgiven, sickness and pain patiently borne, by the true follower of Christ. To act thus would be 'to place a candle under a bushel or under a bed.' This forms no part of the divine dispensation. It is God's will that the light of his true disciples should 'so shine before men that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in Heaven.'



THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED.

MATT. xiii. 31, 32.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

MARK iv. 30—32.

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

LUKE xiii. 18, 19.

Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

ST. MATTHEW and St. Mark both record this parable to have been delivered at the same time with that of the Sower and the Seed and other parables. St. Luke separates this parable from that of the Sower and the Seed, and states another occasion on which it was spoken by our Lord. After he had healed on the Sabbath Day a woman with 'a spirit of infirmity,' he was rebuked by the ruler of the synagogue for breaking the fourth commandment. St. Luke adds, that thereupon 'all his adversaries were ashamed, and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things

that were done by him.' The parables of the Grain of Mustard Seed and of the Leaven immediately follow, by which our Lord probably intended to point out that the influence of himself and of his little flock, in spite of all the opposition which the malice and hypocrisy of the Jews offered, would gradually gain strength, and would finally prevail.

St. Matt. xiii. 31.—*Grain of Mustard Seed.* It is not known what this plant was, though in all probability it bore no resemblance to that which is now called mustard. The original word is *Sinapi*. We learn from the Rabbinical writers that the *Sinapi* at times grew to the size of a fig-tree, and shadowed a whole tent. It must not, however, be supposed that it ever attained the size of a forest tree. The smallness of the seed, and the greatness of the plant which grew out of that seed, are comparative terms; and it is in the contrast between the two, and in the power of expansion which the seed possessed, that the force of the similitude consists.

32. *Greatest amongst herbs, and becometh a tree.* Not that the seed loses its original nature, and assumes that of a tree; but merely that from its great growth it attains to a size beyond which many trees do not extend.

This parable is prophetic; and the object of it is to represent the rise from small beginnings and the future greatness of that kingdom of Heaven which Jesus of Nazareth came on earth to found. The smallness of the grain of mustard seed corresponds

well with the apparently insignificant source from which the Church of Christ took its origin. The son of the carpenter, and the small band of fishermen of Galilee, together with a tax-gatherer and a few other men and women, seemed in the eyes both of the self-righteous Jews, and the speculative Gentiles, the last persons who were likely to plant a society which should spread itself over the world, and cast its shadow over all the nations of the earth. Still less did this result seem likely when the founder of this sect was put to an ignominious death ; or when the one hundred and twenty forlorn disciples met together, under no visible head, in an upper chamber at Jerusalem, to form plans how they should ‘go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ The vigour of that seed which the Lord had sown in his garden soon showed itself. These one hundred and twenty became within a very few days a considerable community. Three thousand were added to their numbers the very first day on which the seed put forth its shoots ; in a few days afterwards, the number of those that believed was about five thousand. The branches of this plant extended rapidly ; first over Judæa, then into Syria and Asia Minor ; from thence into Greece, the centre of all learning and philosophy ; and finally into Rome, the capital of the world.

By a reference to the history of the Gospel, we see how the parable foretells the silent though rapid advances of that kingdom which at its first beginning seemed weak and helpless, and was treated with scorn.

It soon became a great tree, 'stretching out its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the river.' Already it covers a large part of the known world; and year by year its roots are shooting deeper into the earth, and its shadows are spreading wider and wider. Quietly, yet steadily, it is reaching to that size when it will overshadow all nations; when 'the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.'

Meanwhile, is not this truth almost self-evident, that a system which took its rise from so weak a beginning; which offered no worldly advantages to those who embraced it; which proclaimed open war against all other religions whatsoever; which encountered opposition the most determined from all quarters; which aimed at effecting an entire change in the hearts and affections of men; which invited those who adopted it to present self-denial and hardship, and held out the prospect only of a future and an unseen reward; never could have met with the success which has attended its progress, if it had been propagated by merely human means. If these alone had been at work, it most assuredly would have failed, as other systems have failed both before and since. A hand mightier than that of man must have given it birth: an influence more irresistible than any which human ingenuity can devise must have wrought these wondrous results. That hand must have been 'the finger of God;' that influence must have been shed down from heaven.

THE LEAVEN.

MATT. xiii. 33.

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

LUKE xiii. 20, 21.

And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

THIS parable is recorded both by St. Matthew and St. Luke to have been spoken by our Lord immediately after that of the Grain of Mustard Seed. The occasion on which it was delivered will be found by a reference to that parable. See sup. page 12.

Leaven. The original is derived from a word which signifies 'to ferment.' Leaven answers to the modern term 'yeast.'

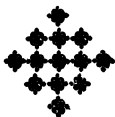
Measures. This word represents a dry measure, containing, as is stated in the margin of the English Bible, 'about a peck and a half, wanting a little more than a pint.' Thus three measures would amount to something less than four pecks; a quantity which would be sufficient for the consumption of an ordinary family at one time. The same quantity of meal is mentioned in Genesis xviii. 6.

As the parable of the Grain of Mustard Seed illustrates the truth that the kingdom of heaven would, from a small beginning, spread in a marvellous manner

over the world, so also does the parable of the Leaven. In both parables the result represented as produced is gradual. The growth of the mustard plant is gradual, yet from time to time the eye can judge of it; the leaven spreads through the meal, and the whole lump which is leavened is changed to the eye, the touch, and the taste. The Church of Christ, spreading like leaven through the world, wrought wondrous changes in the earth; changes that affected not only the nations which received it, but even those which still remained heathen. The parable of the Leaven sets forth not only the effect which the visible Church of Christ has produced in the world, but also, and that no less clearly, the effects which the Gospel of Christ, when received into the heart of a man, brings to pass within his soul. The effect here also is quiet and slow, but at the same time sure, and pervades the whole inner man. As with the meal, 'a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,' so the Gospel of Christ, weak though it seem when contrasted with the influences which are against it, small though its attractions appear by the side of the glare and show of the world, yet if once sincerely and honestly entertained, if admitted into the heart as the one single principle of action, animates by degrees the whole body, soul, and spirit. It quickens every thought, and spiritualizes every desire; it changes darkness into light, lukewarmness into zeal, indifference into eagerness, and restores the image of the divine purity into the soul. It is true that with no child of Adam, while living

upon earth, is this happy work completed. But in spite of infirmities and drawbacks, from which none are exempt, wheresoever the truth of God's Word is allowed free entrance, there its influence is felt, and its power gradually developed. It will force its way into the inmost recesses of the heart; it will penetrate the hidden corners in which carnal affections still lurk; and will discover and lay bare those sources from which secret sins and involuntary breaches of the divine law, spring. Gradually it will change the whole man. 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; all things are become new.' The full meaning and perfect realization of these words corresponds to that happy condition, represented in the parable under the figure of the Leaven, when the principles of the Gospel have so quickened the whole man, that all his tastes, habits, desires, and affections, nay, his whole character, have been entirely changed. The question each must ask himself is, whether this Leaven has begun to work within him; whether such a change has in any degree come over him? He who can feel within him a principle, which substitutes high and heavenly motives for those of earth, and which sets before him a rule of conduct founded on the law of God, instead of the maxims of human prudence, may rest assured that the Leaven of the Gospel is not inactive within him. It must indeed continue to work with increasing force so long as the state of trial upon earth lasts. But if not checked by negligence or wilful resistance,

its effects will quickly become manifest ; gradually its influence will extend deeper and deeper, until, when the time shall arrive for the separation of soul and body, the work of purification shall be completed. Then will the spirit be prepared to meet ' the spirits of just men made perfect ;' and to stand in the presence of God, decked in those pure and white robes which are the heritage of the saints.



THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

MATT. xiii. 44, 45, 46.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

THESE two parables, which seem intended to teach the same lesson, were addressed by our Lord not to the people at large, but to his disciples, 'after he had sent the multitude away,' having delivered in public the four similitudes of the Sower and the Seed, the Tares, the Grain of Mustard Seed, and the Leaven.

44. *Treasure hid in a field.* It was by no means uncommon in the East, and the practice still prevails, to hide money in the ground or elsewhere, in times of public disturbance, or in order to keep it safe from the extortion of some powerful neighbour.

He hideth. That is, keeps the discovery secret, lest some other person should either carry it off, or anticipate him in the purchase of the field.

Buyeth that field. This is intended only to represent the eagerness and determination with which the finder of the treasure acts. His conduct in concealing his discovery from the owner of the field is not, of course, held up to the praise or imitation of Christians.

It was not essential to the object of the parable to express any opinion as to the honesty of the transaction.

45. *Merchant man.* A man who is a trader.

Goodly pearls. The object of the trader was to purchase not merely pearls, which differed very much in value, but *goodly* pearls—pearls of a rich and rare quality.

46. *One pearl of great price.* A pearl so valuable, that it answered the purpose of the merchant to sell all that he had, and buy it. He felt sure that he would be able to resell it at a considerable profit.

The object of both these parables is to represent the kingdom of heaven, that is, the riches of the Gospel of Christ, as of more value than all other things, and to urge the duty of sacrificing all else, in order to secure it. Such a lesson was very needful for the early disciples of Christ. They had both felt and acknowledged that the Gospel which they had espoused contained the words of eternal life. For the sake of it they had already suffered the loss of all things. But though they had borne witness to this truth, there was no little danger lest they should practically deny and abandon it, and return to the world. Persecution, and poverty, and scorn, were but too likely to produce this result, even with those who had with their own eyes seen the Lord Christ. And so it is now. Men are far-sighted, at least in theory, as regards their real interests; and there are but few who will not allow that, if the

happiness which this world and the kingdom of heaven have to offer be placed side by side, the value of the spiritual infinitely outweighs that of the temporal. In words and outward profession scarce any one is found to deny this; in practice few follow it out. To this point the parables are directed. Not only must men exercise care in proposing to themselves that which will alone yield solid and lasting enjoyment, but they must also be ready to give up for this all else which they possess. All objects, save one, are earthly and perishable; mean and worthless when soberly estimated; they often fail, though they seem within the grasp; often, though fair in show, in actual experience they yield no satisfaction. They ill repay labour, and care, and self-denial, spent in pursuit of them. The Gospel alone, of all things given by God to man, amply recompenses those who earnestly seek for it, and honestly embrace it. And this is not only true of the rich rewards promised hereafter in heaven to those that love God, but it holds good even in this life. In more than one passage of the Acts of the Apostles mention is made of the 'great joy' which filled the minds of those who had embraced the Gospel. Can men in the present day not realize this joy? or is it because there never was a time when they knew what it was to be anything but professing Christians, that they cannot enter into the rapture felt by the early believers. If men were now told, for the first time, of the glad tidings of the Gospel, that it holds out the hope of forgiveness of all sins, that

its power can transform them into the image of God, that in it are contained 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,' that it offers peace such as the world cannot give, that it makes those who embrace it heirs of heaven and children of God, and that even the present portion of a Christian, rich though it be, is but an earnest of far greater blessings hereafter, who would not, in such a case, imitate the eagerness and zeal set forth in the parables, and even part with all that he possessed to secure this rich treasure? Who would not be filled with joy above measure? What would be too difficult to undergo? what too precious to give up in order to make this glorious prize his own? Surely the mere fact that men have heard these glad tidings from their earliest infancy ought to make no difference either in their feelings or their conduct. Sad, however, it is to think how many who call themselves Christians receive the offers made by the Son of God with calm indifference, if not with something very like contempt. Thousands there are who expect to inherit the kingdom of God, though they neither love it, nor strive for it, nor are ready to make any sacrifice for it. Let each ask himself this question, with what single object of his affection has he ever parted for the sake of the Gospel. If his conscience returns the answer that he has never made a real sacrifice for the kingdom of heaven's sake, let him remember the words of the Saviour, 'He that will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'

THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA.

MATT. xiii. 47, 48.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

THIS parable, like the two preceding, was addressed by our Lord to his disciples in private, and is the last of the seven similitudes recorded almost continuously in the 13th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.

47. *Net.* The Greek word, *sagene*, answers nearly to that which we call a draw-net. From descriptions given of it in profane authors, it seems to have been a net capable of stretching from one end of a given piece of water to the other, and of reaching down to the bottom.

Gathered of every kind. Had got together some of every sort of fish found in the water.

48. *The bad.* The original has the meaning of 'corrupt,' 'putrid.' It is intended to mark the utter worthlessness of that which was thrown away.

Our Lord himself gives the interpretation of this parable in the following words:—

MATT. xiii. 49, 50.

So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

This parable resembles closely that of the Tares of the Field. There is, however, a certain difference between the two. In the parable of the Tares, the truth mainly intended to be taught seems to be the intermixture of good and bad in the Church, so long as it continues to resemble the seed growing in the field of the world. In the parable of the Draw-net, prominence is given to the fact, that one day a final separation will be made between these two classes, and the kingdom of heaven will realize that perfection which is its proper characteristic. The net was let down to enclose a draught of fishes; the Gospel dispensation was revealed in order to bring mankind under its sanctifying influence. This process is now at work; the net has been cast into the sea; it is even now sweeping the waters, and is collecting fish of every kind. They are now in the act of being drawn to the shore: now is the time of trial. As a net pulled through the sea makes no distinction between the fish enclosed in its meshes, but draws all alike to land, so is it with the kingdom of heaven. It collects men out of all nations, of every profession, rank, fortune, and character: as with the King of Heaven, so with His kingdom—there is no distinction of persons. The fisherman, while he is drawing his net to the shore, does not stay to consider what kind of fish he has enclosed within its folds. So is it with the outward kingdom of heaven. Those who are fishers for men, must fish in all waters. But when the net has completed its sweep—when the fulness of time, which

God has determined in his everlasting purpose, is come, then will the distinction appear. The fishers draw the net up on the beach, and they sit down quietly, and carefully make a separation between the good and worthless fish which they have secured. So shall it be at the end of the world. Those who have been, as it were, in one water and in one net, shall then be put asunder. Those who have lived together, had all sorts of intercourse one with another—nay, more than this, have been baptized with one baptism, have been taught the same heavenly lessons, read the words of the same Gospel, attended the same Church, repeated the same creed, received the same spiritual food at their Master's Table, these shall then be separated for ever. The distinction between them will be as wide and as marked as that which the fisherman makes when he casts away the worthless fish, and takes home the good in his vessels. Out of the midst of the righteous shall the angels separate the wicked. In the world they have been mingled together; but 'the Lord knoweth them that are His.' He can distinguish between true goodness and the mere form of godliness. And whereas now there are, as it were, many kinds of fish; whereas now there are a thousand distinctions between man and man, some natural, some artificial; whereas fresh lines of difference are ever being drawn, which for the time seem of great importance: then shall it appear that there is but one real distinction—one great, broad, unmistakable line; the difference between the good and the bad—between worth and worthlessness.

Let Christians then keep the picture of that net, that shore, those unerring fishermen, those vessels, and that rejection, ever before them. As the net is drawn along every day, and as every day it is coming nearer to the shore, let each man ask himself for which he is fit—for the vessels, or to be cast away? Is he becoming daily more and more worthy to be treasured up in the vessels as meet for his Master's service? Or is he growing worse, and more worthless; fitter only for the furnace of fire, whose end is to be burned?



THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

MATT. xviii. 23—35.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

THE occasion of this parable was as follows. Our Lord had been warning his disciples to be humble and harmless; to avoid causes of offence against their brethren, and not to despise children and those that might seem to be of little account. He then proceeds, ver. 15, to teach them in what manner they ought to deal towards their brethren who might

trespass against them. St. Peter seems to have felt some doubt as to the extent to which the forgiveness of the offender, recommended by his Master, ought to be carried. He puts therefore this question, ver. 21, 'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?' doubtless under the impression that his charity was measured in a very large and liberal scale. Our Lord's answer is clear and emphatic; 'I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven.' The expression seventy times seven of course implies only an indefinite number. By way of a further explanation, our Lord immediately adds the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, the moral of which would have been plain, even if it had not been set forth in our Heavenly Master's own words at the conclusion of the narrative.

23. *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened.* As if our Lord had said, Since such is the law of my Gospel on the subject of forgiveness of trespasses from every man towards his brother, therefore the rule of God's dealing towards men in the pardon of their offences against himself will be that which is illustrated by the conduct of the king represented in the parable.

Would take account of his servants. Would reckon with them for the sums of money in which they were each his debtors. We may suppose that these servants had to render an account to their lord as governors of a province, the tribute from which they

had received for him; or that in some similar way they were responsible to him.

24. *Ten thousand talents.* The weight of the talents, a term applied to both gold and silver, varied very much in different countries. The value of the sum here mentioned, as given in the margin of our English Bibles, is calculated according to the Greek talent of silver. The exact amount is immaterial; all that we need understand is, an exceedingly large sum of money.

25. *To be sold.* That is, as a slave. The sale of the person of a debtor to satisfy his creditor was allowed both by the Roman and Jewish law. See Levit. xxv. 39, 2 Kings iv. 1. It was a common practice in all eastern countries.

26. *Fell down and worshipped him.* Entreated him in the most abject manner, and in the posture of a suppliant.

28. *One hundred pence.* See note in the margin of our Bible. The word rendered 'pence' is the Latin word *denarius*; a silver coin of the value of seven-pence halfpenny of our money, and introduced by the Romans into use among the Jews. This sum is intended by its small amount to contrast with the very large debt which the king forgave to his servant.

Took him by the throat. That is, as the Greek word implies, with such violence as almost to strangle him.

29. *Fell down at his feet, &c.* It is to be remarked, that exactly the same attitude is employed, and the

same language used by the one servant towards his fellow, as by that servant to his lord.

31. *Very sorry.* This natural expression of sorrow and pity on the part of the fellow-servants denotes the contrast between them and the Unmerciful Servant.

Told unto their lord. Gave him, as the original expresses it, an exact and clear account of all that had happened.

33. *Shouldest thou not.* Or according to the full force of the original, ‘wert thou not bound?’—‘was there not a strong moral obligation upon thee?’

34. *Tormentors.* Such is the literal meaning of the original, which is however often used merely to denote gaolers; and for this reason, that torture very frequently accompanied imprisonment, and was inflicted by the warders of the prison.

The application of this parable is contained in our Lord’s concluding words, ‘So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.’ Of all the duties enforced in the New Testament none is more frequently or more earnestly recommended than forgiveness of injuries. Christians are taught in their Lord’s own prayer to pray that their Father may forgive them their trespasses as they forgive their brethren. Immediately at the close of that Prayer, as given by St. Luke, come these weighty words: ‘If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you:’

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.' And thus, not to quote many other passages, St. Paul says, 'Be ye tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you;' and St. Peter, 'not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing.'

In these, and such like cautions, the Gospel is the very antidote to the deepest corruptions of man's heart. Wrong suffered at the hands of a brother creates a feeling of dislike towards him; and this feeling, if not checked, leads to a desire to repay the injury thus inflicted. That such a desire is even in a worldly point of view most useless, and that it can only have the effect of rendering an enemy a ten-fold greater enemy than before, needs surely no proof. But the notion was once universally held, and even in Christian countries is but too common, that to forgive an injury is a sign of an unmanly and cowardly spirit, and that revenge is a mark of courage. True courage consists, not in revenge, but in forgiveness. It requires much more resolution and determination to oppose the usages of the world, and to extend a hearty forgiveness to an offending brother, than to comply with its rules, and practise revenge and retaliation. Pride also often whispers that to offer the hand of reconciliation is to acknowledge oneself in the wrong; or that at all events, before the offender can expect such a favour, he is bound to sue for pardon.

Against all these unchristian feelings the parable is directed. It teaches plainly this lesson that as all are, or at least ought to be, conscious of the necessity of forgiveness for sins at the hands of their Heavenly Father, so are they bound to forgive from their hearts every one the trespasses of his brother. Or, in other words, a hearty readiness to forgive others is a necessary condition of forgiveness from God. This disposition however, as is the case with other Christian graces, possesses in itself no actual merit to deserve or procure pardon ; but is a condition or qualification absolutely necessary, in order that through the merits of Christ, man may find acceptance and reconciliation with that God whom he has so grievously offended.

But the Saviour enforces not only forgiveness, but forgiveness from the heart. To say outwardly, and to pretend to others, that an injury is forgotten, when a remembrance of it is secretly cherished in the heart; to express reconciliation with the lips, and to nourish the expectation that some time or other an opportunity may occur for retorting secretly on the offender, is no Christian forgiveness ; it is not that 'love in deed and in truth' of which the Apostle speaks. To have no unkind feelings towards the man who has done wrong ; to pray for him ; to utter no sly insinuations, and to cast no slur, upon his character ; never to attempt to lessen him in the esteem of others ; to be heartily sorry at his misfortunes ; cordially to rejoice at his success ; to conceal his faults, and make known his virtues ; such are some of the signs of that

forgiveness from the heart which the parable urges on Christians; such is the genuine and true reconciliation which can alone be pleasing in the sight of Him who 'has set man's sins from Him as far as the east is from the west.'

Above all, as the injuries of one man towards another, when compared with the offences of men towards their Father in Heaven are but as one hundred pence compared with ten thousand talents, the reason for which God has promised to forgive sinners must be steadily kept in view. 'God for Christ's sake has forgiven us.' If He was pleased to give His own Son to suffer for man, and thereby to reconcile his creatures to Himself, what sacrifice can be too great for man to make in order to reconcile to himself one of his own brethren; one for whom, as well as for himself, Christ died. What can be so powerful a check to angry feelings and revengeful thoughts as to meditate on Him, who 'when he was reviled reviled not again?' What so wholesome a restraint under provocation or injury as to call to mind His last words on the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?' What so strong a motive for a meek, quiet, and placable spirit as constantly to bear in mind this great Christian truth, which lies at the very root of the Gospel, that 'without charity all man's doings are nothing worth,' and that the love of man should follow the pattern of Him 'who loved us,' and 'gave himself for us, when we were yet sinners?'

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

MATT. XX. 1—16.

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the Goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

THERE is here an instance of the inconvenience which attends the division of God's word into chapters and verses, although it is clear that on many accounts such a division is absolutely necessary. For, as the 16th chapter opens with the parable, it is easy

to imagine that no notice will be taken of the concluding verses of the preceding chapter. On these, however, the main force of the parable depends, as is shown by the identity of the words which close our Lord's answer to his Apostles, in the 19th chapter, and of those which contain the moral of the parable, Chap. xx. 16.

The occasion of the parable is shortly as follows :

Our Lord, Chap. xix. 23, had been led to declare the difficulty which would attend the admission of a rich man into the kingdom of heaven. Upon this, Peter, in a spirit, as it seems, of self-satisfaction at the devotion of himself and his fellow apostles to their Master's service, exclaims—' Behold we have left all and followed thee ; what shall we have therefore ? ' As if he had said—' We are not rich, nor have we trusted in riches ; nay, we have resigned all for the sake of the Gospel ; surely, then, we shall find no such difficulty in receiving admission into the kingdom of heaven, as has been represented to be the inevitable lot of those who ' trust in uncertain riches . ' Our Lord's answer is plain, that to those his disciples who had faithfully followed him, the special reward should be allotted, that they should ' Sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel . ' Nor was the self-denial of the apostles alone to be rewarded ; but ' every one who had forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for their Saviour's sake, should receive an hundredfold, and should inherit everlasting life . ' But

he immediately adds the caution, that 'many that are first shall be last, and the last first'—a caution which he proceeds to illustrate in the parable. The particular moral of it will be seen in these same words, which introduce the narrative, and with a slight addition, conclude it.

1. *For.* This word is clearly intended to connect what follows with the preceding verse.

The kingdom of heaven, that is, God's ordinary course of dealing with mankind in dispensing the privileges of the Gospel, is of the same character as the conduct of the householder in the parable.

Went out early. 'At break of day.' The division of the day among the Jews, like that among the Greeks and Romans, was into twelve hours, calculated from sunrise to sunset. The first hour answered to what is now six o'clock, though it seems that some slight variation took place in the winter, when the sun did not rise until after that hour.

Vineyard. Some parts of Judæa, Peræa, for instance, in which our Lord very probably was at the time he uttered this parable, abounded, as is mentioned by Josephus, with vineyards.

2. *Penny.* The original word is a 'denarius,' which, as is stated in the marginal note of the English Bible, was of the value of $7\frac{1}{2}d$. This was no inconsiderable sum, allowing for the difference in value of the precious metals; and it formed the usual daily pay of a Roman soldier.

3. *Third hour.* According to the mode of reckon-

ing time, mentioned above, this would be nine o'clock.

Market place. The 'agora' of the Greeks, or 'forum' of the Romans, the place of public resort, in which buying, and selling, and hiring of workmen was ordinarily carried on. At the third hour, the crowd of persons attending the market place was usually at its height.

4. *Right*, i. e., fair, just.

5. *Sixth and ninth hours.* That is, noon and three o'clock.

6. *Eleventh hour.* Five o'clock in the afternoon.

8. *When even was come.* This punctual payment of wages at the close of the day's labour, is in accordance with the rule of the Mosaical Law. 'The wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.'—Levit. xix. 13. See also Deut. xxiv. 15.

Beginning from the last unto the first. From those, that is, who were last hired, and finishing with those who were engaged first.

11. *Good man.* Literally, the 'master of the house.' The term 'goodman,' in the English language, had formerly this meaning.

12. *Heat.* The original implies 'burning' or 'scorching' heat.

13. *Friend.* The Greek word hardly expresses the present notion of the word 'friend.' It is rather a common mode of addressing strangers or inferiors, and

would not have been applied by one intimate friend to another.

14. *That thine is.* That which fairly belongs to you—that which you have earned according to our agreement.

Is thine eye evil because I am good? The expression 'evil eye,' means, as in Prov. xxiii. 6, 'an eye of envy,' and the sense is 'Art thou envious, because I choose to be bountiful?' Should you not, instead of drawing invidious comparisons between yourselves and your companions, rather feel that I have a perfect right to make what distinctions I please, and also conclude that I have good reasons for what I am doing?"

It has already been said that the moral of the parable is to be found in the 16th verse—"Many that are last shall be first, and the first last, for many be called but few chosen." The lesson designed to be taught seems shortly as follows: On every side there are many admitted to partake of the privileges of God's kingdom. Yet no one can fail to mark the wide difference which exists between man and man in the same country, even in the same town and village, as regards their spiritual advantages and opportunities of religious improvement. One man is born of Christian parents, early instructed in the truths of God's word, surrounded by good examples and influences, with means of grace frequent and regular. Such a man is, outwardly at least, first in the kingdom of

God ; he, if any man, ought to win heaven ; as he has been called, so it will be certainly his own fault if he be not chosen. Another man, born of careless, perhaps of vicious parents, is left to himself. Surrounded by evil examples, with few opportunities of attending public means of grace, exposed to temptations manifold and pressing. Such a man seems to be one of the last in the kingdom of God. An example of this is to be found in the case of the Jews who were first called into the household and Church of God. Yet, though they prided themselves on these their special privileges, they forfeited the divine favour, and were rejected ; while the Gentiles, who were despised by the children of Abraham, were admitted late into the heavenly vineyard, and obtained a full share of its glorious heritage. And in like manner, may it not come to pass that many of those who seem to be first fail, through a false reliance on their opportunity, to bring forth fruit in proportion to the privileges accorded to them ? They will consequently find themselves disappointed in the expectations which they had formed of acceptance with God. Many of those, on the contrary, who are last, and yet have made the most of their scanty means of religious improvement, will find their exertions rewarded no less than if they had been highly favoured with opportunities upon earth. In what proportion the Judge of all the earth, who cannot but do right, will take account of opportunities of good and evil, of warning and temptation, presented to each separate individual, no one knows ; and on this point

it is not for man to inquire. But when it is said that 'many be called but few chosen,' the truth, often enforced elsewhere in Scripture, is repeated, that though many are invited to the knowledge of God's will, few comparatively will so use that knowledge as to find approval in the eyes of the Most High. Few will retain that humility, that entire submission to God's will, that utter denial of any claim or privilege, as of right belonging to them, as will in the end allow them to partake of the rewards of heaven. May there not even be some who, at the last day, will see many of their brethren whose ignorance of religious truth they have pitied, nay, even attempted to relieve, admitted to God's favour, while they themselves will be rejected? And this result will ensue because they have forfeited that favour by a careless abuse of the privileges vouchsafed to them, and by a false reliance on a bare and empty profession of Christianity. 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'

THE TWO SONS.

MATT. xxi. 28—31.

But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of the twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

THIS parable was spoken on the day after our blessed Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had slept at Bethany, and returned the next morning into the holy city, where, as he was teaching in the temple, the chief priests and elders came to him, and asked him 'by what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?' The object of this question, doubtless, was to induce our Lord to declare himself the Son of God. Instead, however, of fulfilling their expectations, he proposes to them another question, promising that, if they answered it, he would satisfy their inquiries. His purpose in demanding of them whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from men, was to expose the insincerity of the chief priests and elders in their conduct towards John the Baptist. They had sent a messenger (John i. 19) to inquire who John the

Baptist was; and yet when he had given them evidence that the true Messiah was already among them, they had refused to search for that Messiah, or to profit by the warnings of the Baptist. The answer of the elders to our Lord's question, 'we cannot tell,' was mere hypocrisy. They knew well enough, but they feared to utter the conviction of their hearts, lest they should stand self-condemned. Our Lord, thereupon, delivers the parable of the Two Sons, in order to point out further to the Jewish rulers their hypocritical professions and their actual conduct towards God's messenger, as contrasted with the behaviour of others who, in outward protestations, were far behind themselves.

29. *I will not.* 'I do not wish,' 'do not choose to go.'

He repented, or as we should say, 'he thought better of it.'

31. *The publicans and harlots.* Publicans are here joined with the most depraved characters, as is the case in many other passages of the Gospels. It is worthy of remark that, in these words, our Lord does not declare that the rulers and elders of the Jews would be absolutely excluded from the kingdom of God. He only reminds them that publicans and sinners, that class of persons whose spiritual wretchedness the Pharisees and other Jewish rulers counted most hopeless and desperate, had welcomed the preaching of John the Baptist, and had been baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins. The Phari-

sees and Sadducees, on the other hand, though professing to be anxious to know the character of John's mission, had in reality made no change in their lives, in consequence of his preaching. Our Lord, therefore, declares that those who had turned from their evil ways, upon the honest exhortation of John, should take the lead into the kingdom of God before those whose religion had been no more than that of the lips. Even for such as these the door of repentance was still open—but unless they turned from their evil ways, and framed their lives in accordance with their professions, they would certainly be excluded. The moral of the parable need not, however, be confined to the case of these two classes of the Jewish people. It holds forth to the children of men, in every age, this warning, that the pride of self-righteousness is often more difficult to be won to a real and hearty devotion to God's service than the heart, which, though sunk in sin, may be roused to a sense of its own wretchedness. If the open and profligate sinner be compared with the man who keeps the outward precepts of the moral law, and with such observance is satisfied, there can surely be no doubt that, in itself, respectability of conduct is far better than dissolute and abandoned profligacy. But if it be asked which of these two men is most likely to be roused to a sense of his danger, the moral of the parable, illustrating the conduct of the Pharisees as contrasted with that of the publicans, coincides with daily experience as to the answer which must be

given. He who is sunk in the depths of vice cannot but feel painfully at times the wretchedness of his condition and the danger of the course which he is pursuing. Conscience, God's inward monitor, will not always be silent, but will at times rouse him to the conviction that his way is, without doubt, the way of death. The warnings afforded by the sad end of others, or it may be some signal judgment brought on his own head, may, through God's mercy, rouse him from his evil ways, and force him, in deep penitence and hearty amendment of life, to seek for pardon through the merits of his Saviour. It must, however, be carefully remembered that it is no argument for continuing in sin, that instances of conversion from open wickedness to a holy and Christian course of living have, by God's mercy, been witnessed. There is much reason to fear, on the contrary, that a man who is satisfied with his own righteousness, and is continually making boast of his readiness to obey the divine will, but yet never gets beyond loud protestations and empty professions, and never sets to work to practise rigid self-denial and regular compliance with God's law, will continue hardened in the ignorance of his own danger. It has been well said that there is no such fault as counting we have no fault. The pride of self-righteousness is ever ready to whisper that it need pay no regard to exhortations to obedience and to practical godliness of living, and that advice such as this is intended only for the open and notorious sinner. In such false security many have

passed their lives, coldly rejecting the warnings which God gives them, fondly dreaming that all was right, while all the time they are becoming each day less and less willing to do the will of him who requires a humble and lowly spirit, or to set to work in that vineyard where men must be content to labour in simple trust in God's mercy. The parable was intended to warn the rulers of the Jews of the danger under which they lay, lest such an evil should befall them. And with most of them, at least, our Lord's words proved fearfully true. May all have grace betimes to lay his warning to heart, and to remember that if they draw nigh unto God with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, while their heart is far from him, and their lives deny him, they will most surely lay up for themselves that punishment which will be the portion of the hypocrites, and of those who cry 'Lord, Lord, and yet do not the things which he says.'



THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

MATT. xxi. 33—44.

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast

MARK xii. 1—11.

And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the wine fat, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.

LUKE xx. 9—18.

Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is

him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our's. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?

the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our's. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

IT will be seen that the Evangelists record this parable with very slight variations from each other; and they all agree as to the time and place where it was delivered, viz., in the Temple during the last days of our Lord's ministry, in the interval between his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and his betrayal. It forms one of those solemn warnings

which the Son of God uttered to the Jewish rulers and people up to the very last hour of his sojourn among them. St. Matthew and St. Mark state that the parable was spoken to the chief priests and elders; and St. Mark adds, 'to the scribes.' St. Luke records that it was addressed to the people at large. But as this last Evangelist almost immediately afterwards mentions the chief priests and scribes, it is clear that they were among our Lord's audience on this occasion.

St. Matt. v. 33.—St. Mark in verse 1 mentions 'the wine fat,' which was dug out of the ground, and lined with brick or stone. Into this the juice of the grape ran out of the wine-press which was placed above it.

A Tower, for the security of the husbandmen who worked in the vineyard. Isaiah also, cap. v. in his similitude of a vineyard mentions the tower.

Went into a far country. The original word used by all the three Evangelists means only, 'went away out of the country.' St. Luke, verse 9, adds, 'for a long time.'

34. *The time of the fruit.* The time, that is, of gathering the fruit. St. Mark and St. Luke express this by the words 'at the season.'

41. *They say unto him*, that is, the chief priests and elders, who are here led to form a conclusion which our Lord immediately turns against themselves. St. Mark and St. Luke ascribe these words to our Lord himself, though his hearers do not venture to dispute the justice of the punishment which is represented as

inflicted on the rebellious husbandmen. St. Luke, v. 16, adds that the people, when they heard this sentence, said, 'God forbid;' a remark which shows how strongly they felt that the parable applied to their own conduct as a nation.

42. *The Builders*, that is, the rulers of the Jews who might easily have seen, if they had not been obstinate in their unbelief, that Jesus was indeed that Messiah upon whom all their privileges and hopes as God's favoured people rested.

44. *Whosoever shall fall, &c.* The meaning of this verse, which is found also in St. Luke, seems to be, that whosoever shall take offence at the life or the teaching of the Son of Man while upon earth, shall suffer such spiritual hurt that he shall hardly, and with difficulty, recover; but he who remains hardened in his unbelief, after that the Son of God shall be glorified by his resurrection and his restoration to the throne of his glory, shall incur the penalty of divine vengeance.

The application of this parable, the idea of which may have been taken from the similitude in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, even if it had not been explained by our Lord himself, is sufficiently clear. The vineyard which the householder planted is the Church established in the land of Israel by God himself. The husbandmen, to whose care that vineyard was entrusted, are the people of the Jews, placed in possession of God's visible Church, and settled in the country which he had marked out for them. The

servants of the householder, who are represented as filling the office of messengers to the husbandmen, are the prophets and holy men of the older dispensation, who discharged faithfully the commission entrusted to them, of delivering God's promises and threatenings to the children of Abraham. Of the treatment which they experienced at the hands of those to whom they were sent, there is abundant evidence in the older Scriptures. See especially 2 Chron. xxiv. 20—22; Jerem. xx. 1, 2; xxxvii. 15, and xxxviii. 6. Thus far the parable is historical; representing the past ingratitude and rebellion of the Jewish people to their Divine Sovereign. The forbearance of the master of the vineyard to punish the disobedience and open hostility of the husbandmen, even when their repeated acts of cruelty towards his servants had amply merited a signal vengeance at his hands, marks plainly the patience and long-suffering of the Lord.

The remaining portion of the parable is prophetical; and points out how, when the Most High in his infinite love and condescension had sent his well-beloved Son, if through His mediation he might win back to obedience his rebellious people, they would set the commission of that Son at defiance, and would put him to an ignominious death. The consequence of that last act of open apostasy on the part of God's children is foretold in the words: 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.' How this prophecy

was fulfilled ; how when, to use the words of St. Paul, the Jews ‘ put away the word of God from them, and judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life,’ that word was preached unto the Gentiles ; how the vengeance of the Most High was poured out upon the children of Abraham to an extent such as finds no parallel in the history of any other nation ; how their sufferings at the destruction of Jerusalem exceeded those of any other people either before or since ; how for many centuries the Jews have been a despised and wandering race, of whom but few, comparatively speaking, have had their eyes opened to understand that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed ‘ that stone which has become the head of a corner ;’ how ‘ a holy nation and a peculiar people,’ formed out of those who in different ages and countries have embraced the offer of salvation, and who have brought forth fruits corresponding to their profession, has ever since constituted the vineyard of God upon earth ; all this the history of the Church teaches so plainly that he who runs may read.

The conclusion is obvious, that there is a limit beyond which God will not allow the privileges which he vouchsafes to be set at nought, or his long-suffering to be abused ; and that as his mercies are sure and fail not to those who value and improve them aright, so his punishments are certain when once his patience is exhausted. The example of the withdrawal of the divine favour from the Jews, and of the utter overthrow of the Church and nation, is a warning to all

to whom the loving tidings of salvation have been sent, lest through ingratitude and rebellion they also be cast out of the light of God's countenance, and be no longer numbered among that chosen heritage whose privilege it is to labour in the holy vineyard of the Church of Christ. And as the holiness, or the wickedness, of any nation is made up of the actions and lives, either good or evil, of its individual members, so will the continuance of the light which has been vouchsafed to them depend on the ready obedience and cheerful compliance with which each one, who has been admitted into the ark of Christ's Church, strives to fulfil the terms of his spiritual engagement. Thus the increase or the removal of that candlestick which God has lighted will follow according as many of those who have promised to fight manfully under Christ's banner stand to their promises, and acknowledge, or deny, the authority of Him who is the Saviour of the world.



THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON.

MATT. xxii. 2—14.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

THIS parable, which must not be confounded with the one somewhat similar, recorded by St. Luke, cap. xiv. 16 (see *infra*, page 90), forms part of those discourses which the Saviour delivered to the Jewish people in the Temple immediately before his betrayal and death. It is introduced by the expression, found in several passages in the Gospels, 'Jesus answered,'

which only implies that the parable has a reference to what had gone before.

2. *The kingdom of heaven is like, &c.* The dealings of God, in conferring the blessing of his heavenly kingdom, resemble the conduct of the king represented in the parable.

Marriage. That is, 'a marriage feast.'

3. *To call them that were bidden.* Those who had been before invited.

6. *Entreated them spitefully.* Rather, according to the original, 'treated them with insult.'

9. *Highways.* The literal rendering of the expression here used would be 'the passages of the roads.' It means the intersection of one road by another. The word in verse 10, translated 'highways,' is simply 'roads,' or 'streets.'

11. *Which had not on a wedding garment.* It was a common practice among the ancients, and especially in the east, to provide for guests suitable attire, corresponding to the dignity of the entertainer; and thus to sit down to a feast without the robe furnished by the master of the house would be considered a great insult.

12. *Friend.* The word used was the common form of address from a superior to an inferior. See St. Matthew, xx. 13.

He was speechless. As having no excuse to offer.

14. *Many are called, but few chosen.* This was probably a proverbial expression. It also forms the conclusion of the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

This parable seems naturally to divide itself into two parts; the first from verse 2 to 7, in which is set forth the refusal of those who were originally invited to partake of the marriage feast; while the second part, verse 8—14, represents the conduct of one of those who were subsequently called in to fill the vacant places of the guests who had declined to attend. The first part resembles in many particulars the preceding parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, and evidently refers to the wilful rejection by the Jewish people of God's loving invitations, to their treatment of those who, from time to time, were sent to renew to them his offers of reconciliation, and to the signal punishment which was at length inflicted on them by the overthrow of their church and nation.

The second portion of the parable represents the call of the Gentiles to profit by those blessings which the Jews had rejected, and their acceptance of that offer. It then proceeds to illustrate the temper and the spirit in which many of those who had been made partakers of the blessings of the Gospel covenant would receive the divine favour, and the method of God's dealings towards them. This part of the parable conveys a lesson suitable for the members of the Church of Christ in all ages. The Saviour elsewhere teaches, particularly in the parable of the Tares and the Wheat, that both bad and good will be found in his Church, that to both these classes the free gift of salvation is tendered, that to both the

means of grace are offered, to both the hope of heaven and the fear of hell are held out as the reward of an improvement of these privileges, or the penalty of a disregard of them. The parable supplies the warning that men may receive the invitation of the Gospel, and may, to outward appearance, be admitted to its blessings, and yet be found in the end to have no portion among the true guests of the heavenly feast. The guest who came in to the feast not having a wedding garment is a type of a large class, who, while they enjoy visible communion with the Church of Christ on earth, are yet wanting in that personal quality of a saving faith which is the only title to the divine favour—a faith which clings steadfastly to the Son of God, as the one hope of acceptance, and at the same time ‘worketh by love.’ Such a quality is indeed the free gift of God; it appertains to no man through any merit of his own, but it is promised to all who seek for this favour as the reward of a steadfast abiding in Christ, and a patient continuance in well doing. This proper garment, this one thing necessary to salvation, though it be the result of the free grace of God, is, nevertheless, dependent on the free will and co-operation of each baptised member of Christ. This essential qualification, which is the one criterion between the real and nominal believer, will not be bestowed save upon those who second heartily the influence of the Holy Spirit, through whom alone comes the will and the power to live up to the standard of the gospel of Christ.

And let it be remembered that, in the day when the Great King shall come to see those who have been invited to his heavenly kingdom; when he shall decide who of them are worthy, who are unworthy, to sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, when he shall separate them according to the standard, not of their professions, but of their lives and actions, no plea of ignorance or of omission, no excuse of forgetfulness, or of inability to attain this indispensable requisite, will then be accepted. All who have not declined the invitation know well the conditions of it; all who call themselves Christians are at least in a position to understand the responsibilities of their profession. He who thinks he can put an outward communion in Christian privileges in the place of faith and charity, or that he can belong to Christ without having the spirit of Christ, may indeed deceive himself for a time, and pass undetected amidst the other guests at the marriage feast of the Lord; but when that Lord comes to see the guests, he will be speechless. The terrible silence of conviction will overwhelm him with shame and confusion. The excuses and the apologies, the self-satisfied security and easy delusion which have so often served him in times past, will stand him in stead no longer. Conscience will be at length fully aroused, and he will be awakened to a fearful reality of the long-forgotten truth, that except through Christ, and through a lively faith and active love towards Him, there can be no acceptance or hope of salvation.

The warning with which the parable concludes, 'For many are called, but few chosen,' is intended to convey this solemn truth that the case represented in the narrative is not a solitary exception, but that, out of many who have been invited to share the blessings and the salvation of the Gospel, comparatively few will be found to have profited by these privileges: few will have so used the many opportunities for 'making their calling and election sure' as to be chosen to partake of those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. The robe of habitual righteousness is the only assurance of acceptance. Without this requisite, many will indeed claim to be admitted to the marriage supper of the Lamb. All such claimants will meet the same refusal; to all will the same question be addressed, 'How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?'



THE TEN VIRGINS.

MATT. XXV. 1—13.

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

THIS parable is a continuation of the discourse delivered by our Lord in the preceding chapter, in which he had been foretelling to his disciples the reward which would be bestowed on those of his servants who should duly watch for his return to judgment, and the penalty which would be the lot of those who should be found to have been negligent of the privileges vouchsafed to them.

1. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven, &c.* At the time when the Son of Man shall come to render to every man according to his works, the character and

destiny of those who have been invited to partake of the privileges of the Gospel, will resemble that of the Ten Virgins, represented in the parable.

Took their lamps. Marriages in eastern countries are usually celebrated at night; and the Ten Virgins are described as going forth to meet the bridegroom, who is bringing home his bride.

6. *At midnight.* At a later hour than usual, when they did not expect him.

7. *Arose*, or, according to the original, 'were awakened.'

8. *Are gone out.* The translation in the margin of the Bible is more accurate—'are going out.'

10. *To the marriage*, that is, to the marriage feast.

12. *I know you not*—I do not acknowledge you as my friends.

Our Lord himself, in verse 13, gives the practical application of this parable, the design of which is to enforce the duty of watchfulness, a duty insisted on in the New Testament with peculiar earnestness. Thus our Lord himself—'What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch!' 'Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or midnight, or cock-crowing, or in the morning.' So St. Paul—'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith:' 'Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober:' and St. Peter—'Be sober, be vigilant:' and St. John, in the Revelation, describing the character of his ascended Lord, 'Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth.'

The duty of watchfulness is peculiarly a Christian duty; that is, it is not enforced in the pages of the Old Testament; much less does it form part of any religious systems devised by men. And it is further to be remarked, that most of the passages which refer to this duty speak of it in connexion with our Lord's *sudden* coming. Indeed, this is implied in the very notion of watchfulness; for if timely notice were given to men of each one of the divine dispensations, vigilance on their part would obviously be superseded.

It may be urged, however, that if men were informed beforehand of the time of their Lord's coming (which, so far as their opportunities for repentance and acceptance with Him are concerned, is identical with the hour of their death), they would take care to amend their ways betimes, and be prepared to meet the summons to judgment. Such, however, is no part of God's dispensation to his creatures. It is enough for man to be assured, by the voice both of conscience and revelation, that this life is a state of probation and of responsibility; a preparation for another and better life hereafter. And if he be satisfied that he is liable to be called upon at any moment, and without any previous warning, to render an account of this his responsibility, it follows that a careful providence against danger and surprise ought to be the habitual tone and temper of his mind.

The necessity of this duty of watchfulness is very

obvious. It is not sufficient that a Christian should be at one period of his life meek, or forgiving, or pure in heart, or self-denying; it is not enough that these graces may have been cultivated and improved during one portion of his probation upon earth. If he would entertain a sure hope of acceptance at his Saviour's coming, he must be continually on his guard, that these graces are not waxing cold: he must ever assure his own heart that they have not been allowed to grow less real and lively than formerly. Without watchfulness, without a vigilant search directed into his innermost thoughts, and based on the possibility of an immediate summons to judgment, such an assurance can never be secured.

Watchfulness is well understood in matters pertaining to this life. The husbandman watches for the most favourable opportunity of sowing his seed, or gathering in his crop. The merchant looks out eagerly for the right moment at which to make his bargains. Success, which is called luck, or good fortune, is often the effect of watchfulness, and the result of prudence, and foresight, and vigilant circumspection. And in like manner, in the hour when the summons to depart from this world is heard—a summons given, it may be, without any note of its immediate approach, that man alone who has ever steadfastly practised the duty of watchfulness will be found calm, quiet, and composed; disturbed by no hurry, or anxiety, or uneasiness, or self-reproach; harassed by

no crowding together of thoughts, and prayers, and penitence, and remorse. The continual realization of the Saviour's coming is the only preparation for a thankful and joyful resignation of the soul into the hands of Him who gave it.



THE TALENTS.

MATT. XXV. 14—30.

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliverdst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliverdst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed, and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

THIS parable follows immediately upon that of the Ten Virgins. It must not be confounded with

that of The Pounds, St. Luke xix. 11, to which it bears some resemblance. See *infra*, page 132.

The occasions upon which the two parables were uttered are distinct; the one recorded by St. Matthew having, as appears, been spoken after our Lord's entry into Jerusalem; that in St. Luke, before that event. They seem also to have been addressed to different persons; the parable of the Talents having been spoken to the Apostles, that of The Pounds to the people at large. There are, moreover, in each material circumstances which mark for them a distinct character and object.

14. *For the kingdom of heaven is.* These words are not in the original, as is shown by the italics. The sense would perhaps have been better expressed if the words, 'For the Son of Man is as a man travelling,' &c., had been substituted.

Travelling into a far country. The original, as in St. Matthew xxi. 33, merely means 'travelling away from his own country.'

15. *Talents.* The talent was a weight of gold or silver, which varied in different countries. The sum stated in the margin of the English Bible gives the value of the Roman talent.

According to his several ability. According, that is, to the prudence, capacity, and activity which the master knew each of them possessed.

16. *Made them other five talents.* The word 'them' is not in the original. The exact rendering is 'gained; or made, other five talents.'

21. *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* Henceforth, that is, partake of the happiness and blessings which your lord has to bestow.

24. *Reaping where thou hast not sown, &c.* Looking, that is, to reap large gains where you have made a small outlay either of money or labour.

26. *Thou knewest that I reaped, &c.* This is not a confession on the part of the lord that the slothful servant had correctly described his character, but an argument out of the mouth of that servant for his condemnation, as he had not acted in accordance with his own hard conception of his master. If, the lord would say, I was so hard, and cruel, and exacting a master as you describe, why did you not do that which was clearly in your power to do, namely, place out my money at interest.

27. *Exchangers.* The original word means, 'persons who kept tables,' at which they carried on the occupation of bankers, and of borrowing money, and lending it at interest.

Usury.—At the date of the translation of the present English version of the Bible, the word 'usury' conveyed no idea of dishonesty. It simply meant 'interest.'

29. *Unto every one, &c.* This is a proverbial expression frequently used by our Lord. It implies that those who use and improve the talents and advantages which have been bestowed upon them shall receive a more abundant increase; while those who neglect to turn to good account the means and oppor-

tunities which they enjoy shall forfeit the benefit of them.

Shall be taken away even that which he hath. In St. Luke viii. 18, this expression is found thus : ‘ from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.’ He who does not make use of that which is bestowed upon him can hardly be said to have them at all.

As this parable was addressed to our Lord’s immediate followers, it is possible that in its primary application it referred to the due exercise of that spiritual authority which the Son of Man upon his departure from the world would delegate to his apostles, and through them to their successors in the ministry to the end of time. But it has also a wider bearing, and a more general scope. It enforces this great truth, that unto each and every one of the servants of God certain gifts, and talents, and opportunities, in different proportions, by an arrangement which is in God’s hands, are bestowed. These are of various kinds. Money, influence, clearness of intellect, eloquence, bodily health, habits of business, are all instances of such gifts. These are given to men in different proportions. One man is rich, another poor ; one is weak in body, another is strong, and capable of much labour ; one is quick and clever, another dull and slow of apprehension. But the parable points out that in every one of these cases a use and an improvement will be expected of the faculties and opportunities bestowed, whether they be great or small,—not

indeed the *same* improvement in each case, but according to the proportion in which they have been granted: The small results effected by one to whom small powers have been given will be measured by God; not according to the actual amount of such results, but according to the perseverance, activity, and faithfulness with which these powers have been used. He who had gained five talents, and he who had gained two talents, are honoured by a like praise. 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' is addressed to each; 'enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,' is the recompence of both the one and the other. No distinction is made between them, because each had done his best to improve the goods entrusted to his care. And so to all who honestly strive to use to God's honour, and in the service of Christ, and for the welfare of their brethren, those faculties with which they have been blessed—no matter whether those faculties be on a large or a humble scale—no matter whether they be such as the world despises or admires—is the reward of faithful service sure; a reward—not indeed of debt, but of grace—a reward which will be an ample recompence for long and anxious toil in the right employment of those gifts which are bestowed upon every man to "profit withal."

The parable further points out that not only for the misuse, but also for the non-employment of faculties and talents committed to them, men will be brought to account. Slothfulness is sin; idleness and waste of powers is an offence in the sight of God. Merely

to abstain from evil; merely to forbear from an open denial of responsibility to Him, who placed men in this world, and gave them their work to do, is no true service. To be unprofitable,—to turn to no account the gifts of reason, and intellect, and money, and station, and health, is to walk in direct contradiction to the example of Him who came down from heaven ‘not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work.’

No excuse will serve for such an abuse of the talents and opportunities afforded by God to his creatures. It will not do to pretend that he has required too much from his servants. He looks for results only according to their several ability. He knows well the powers of each; He knows too the temptations, and discouragements, and drawbacks, under which each have laboured. For these He will make due allowance according to the abundance of his mercy. But for wilful negligence, and careless indifference to the privileges which He has bestowed, no indulgence can be expected; nor will pardon be extended to those who have systematically set at nought their Saviour’s precept, ‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.’

THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY.

MARK iv. 26—29.

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

THIS is the only parable recorded exclusively by St. Mark. It was delivered on the same occasion as that of the Sower and the Seed, and the other similitudes addressed to the multitude assembled on the shore of the Lake of Genesaret.

27. *Should sleep and rise night and day.* That is, should pass his days and nights in his usual manner, without troubling himself about the seed which had been sown, and which would in due time appear.

28. *For the earth, &c.* This verse is a parenthesis, explaining the expression, 'he knoweth not how,' at the conclusion of the preceding verse. It describes in very short, but accurate terms, the several stages of the growth of corn.

Of herself. That is, spontaneously, without the help of man.

There can be no intention in this parable to encourage the dangerous doctrine that those who have once been admitted to the privileges of the kingdom of Christ need be at no pains to cultivate the grace implanted in their hearts; or that those to whose accept-

ance the glad tidings of the Gospel have once been offered, can expect to bring forth the fruits of holiness, save by watchful care and diligent toil. Such a lesson would be at entire variance with the whole teaching of God's word. The parable is intended to represent the gradual progress of religion in the soul. It sets forth this truth, that the first impressions of God's Spirit are almost imperceptible; that they slowly and gradually acquire strength and vigour; and that in due time they bring forth fruit. Those who look for rapid progress towards Christian perfection, either in themselves or others, may learn from this similitude, that such is not the dispensation of that kingdom of God, which, as our Lord elsewhere assures us, 'cometh not with observation.' The actual experience of men testifies to the truth taught in this parable. Christians who, from the time they became responsible for their actions, have striven manfully to keep their baptismal vows and improve their baptismal privileges, will feel the accuracy of the description given in the parable as regards their own case. As they grow in years, they have grown in grace; but when they look back on their past lives, they are unable to tell by what exact process the improvement has taken place, or at what moment any particular degree of perfection has been attained. Day after day, slowly indeed, yet surely, a change has been wrought in them; imperceptibly their spiritual powers have been developed, they hardly know how. The result alone is plainly visible; 'the fruits

of the Spirit' are brought forth in rich abundance. By the evidence which these afford, the agency of a heavenly power at work in and upon them is felt and acknowledged. And in like manner, penitents who turn from sin to the service of Christ find that the power to subdue ungodly habits, and to master evil tempers, will not come all at once. Slowly and painfully they gain strength to resist the temptations by which they have been formerly overcome, and to quell the passions to which they have been slaves for years. Step by step they learn to withstand evil influences, and to shun enticements to sin, which in times past have held them captive. They cannot tell exactly how or when their 'strength is made perfect in weakness.' But if they look back from month to month, or from year to year, they feel that a mighty, and at times an almost irresistible, power has been at work within them; a power which is visible only in its happy results.

Such is the economy of God's kingdom. 'Patience' must 'have her perfect work.' With those who do not wilfully check his influences, nor by careless indifference quench his motions, the internal agency of the Holy Spirit is ever at work. Man 'knoweth not how'—the effects alone are visible to human eyes. And who that witnesses those effects, either in himself or in his brethren, can fail to be convinced of the utter weakness and helplessness of man; who can fail to be amazed at the wondrous power, and mercy, and patience, and long-suffering of God?

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE x. 30—37.

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

THIS parable was delivered under the following circumstances. A certain lawyer, one of those, that is, whose office it was to read and explain the law to the people, and who are called in St. Matthew's and St. Mark's Gospel Scribes, came to our Lord tempting him, and saying, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' The purpose of the lawyer in putting this question does not seem to have been malicious; he came simply to put our Lord to the trial, and to ascertain what answer he would give to his inquiry. Our Lord meets him by a reference to that law in which he was well versed, and answers

him by the question, 'What is written in the law? how readest thou?' The lawyer replies by stating the two great commandments of love to God and love to our neighbour, as those on which all the teaching both of the law and the prophets was based. Our Lord, with a hearty approval of his declaration, says, 'Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live.' Thus far St. Matthew, Chap. xxii. 35—40, and St. Mark, Chap. xii. 28—34, are very nearly identical with St. Luke, to whose narrative, however, the sequel is peculiar. The lawyer, 'willing to justify himself,' (that is, anxious either to make out that he had not neglected his duty, as enjoined by the law, or to vindicate himself for asking the question, by shewing that it was not so easily answered as might be supposed,) said, 'And who is my neighbour?' Who, that is, stands in such a relation towards me that he can claim from me the title and duty of a neighbour? The lawyer probably expected that our Lord's answer would have restricted the term 'neighbour' to the children of Abraham, in which case he would have been able to plead that towards all such he had fulfilled the law of Moses. The only answer given is the parable which follows, the moral of which our Lord leaves the lawyer to draw for himself, and thereby to answer his own question.

30. *A certain man.* This may be a narrative of a circumstance which actually took place. The man, as is evident from the sequel, was a Jew.

Went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. The distance

between these two places was about twenty miles. The phrase 'went down' is used correctly, as the roads passing through rocks and defiles sloped down from the high ground on which Jerusalem stood to the plain of the Jordan, on the borders of which Jericho was situated. This road was so infested by robbers that it was called the 'bloody road.'

Thieves. More strictly 'robbers;' those who lived by open violence and plunder.

31. *Priest.* One of that order in which, as lineally descended from Aaron, the Jewish priesthood, that is, the office of offering sacrifices in the Temple at Jerusalem, was vested. In the time of David these descendants of Aaron were spread over twenty-four families, among whom the duties of the Temple were distributed according to courses of eight days each. See 1 Chron. xxiv. 19; St. Luke i. 8, 9.

Passed by on the other side. That is, without taking any notice. His pretence for this want of humanity would probably be his fear of pollution in touching a dead body.

32. *Levite.* One of the tribe of Levi, in which was vested the right of assisting the priests in the services of the Temple. To this tribe the priests, the descendants of Aaron, also belonged; but their exclusive privileges gave them a distinct title from the rest of the tribe, who were called only Levites.

When he looked on him, &c. The original means nothing more than that when he saw him he acted in the same manner as the Priest had done.

33. *Samaritan.* The force of the parable lies in the fact that a Samaritan performed towards a Jew those offices of neighbourly kindness and pity which his own countrymen had refused. The Gospels contain continual references (*e.g.* St. John iv. 9) to the feelings of animosity existing between the Jews and the Samaritans. The district of Samaria, in the time of our Lord, was occupied by the descendants of those heathen nations who had been placed there by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, when he led the ten tribes into captivity. These people were partially instructed in the knowledge of the one true God, and having quarrelled with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin who returned from Babylon about rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, they built for themselves a temple on Mount Gerizim, close to the city of Sychar, in which they worshipped God after a corrupt and semi-idolatrous fashion.

34. *Pouring in oil and wine.* These he probably carried with him as provisions on his journey. They were a common recipe for wounds and bruises.

An inn. A place of public reception for travellers, such as is now called in the East a caravanserai.

35. *Two pence.* In the original 'two denarii.' The denarius was the common price of a day's labour, and amounted in value to about sevenpence-halfpenny of English money.

The host. The public receiver at the place where the travellers were wont to stop.

36. *Was neighbour*—i.e. acted the part, and performed the duty and offices of, a neighbour.

37. *Go, and do thou likewise.* These words contain the application of the parable. The design of it is plainly this : to point out that the title of neighbour must not be confined to particular friends or acquaintance, far less to kindred or relations ; but that it must be extended beyond those who entertain the same religious opinions, or are members of the same civil society. All mankind, nay even the most bitter enemies, have a claim on the sympathy and assistance of their fellow-men. The conduct of the Samaritan, as set forth in the parable, enforces strongly this truth. He was on his journey ; he sees before him a fellow-creature in pain and distress ; he does not stop to inquire who he may be, but straightway goes to him with the intention, not merely of expressing pity, but of relieving his sad condition. He must at once have seen that the sufferer was a Jew ; one of a nation whom he had been taught to hate ; between whom and his own people a long series of mutual injuries and insults had placed an almost impassable barrier. The discovery makes no difference in his conduct ; humanity was with him stronger than prejudice. He at once takes such measures for the relief of the sufferer as the occasion suggested, and furnishes that relief out of the very stores which he had taken for his own wants. Nor does he stop here ; he attends him to a place where he can find rest and refreshment until his strength be restored ; he stays with him till

the morning; and at his departure provides for his immediate wants, until he can himself return.

Such is the character here set forth. It teaches that all men, whoever they may be, or wherever they may be found, stand in the relation of neighbour to their brethren. It is no doubt true that kindred and friends possess a stronger claim on sympathy and assistance than an entire stranger can have—certainly far stronger than one whom there is reason to consider an enemy. But whenever the occasion presents itself for relieving actual suffering, then all distinctions between one man and another must be done away at once. It will be no fulfilment of the Christian rule ‘to love our neighbour as ourselves,’ if, in such a case, a man sets to work to calculate what amount of sympathy will satisfy the claim which the particular sufferer has against himself; much less, if he estimates the proportion of relief which the sufferer’s previous conduct towards himself may entitle him to withhold. The only question is, what are his wants? what is the power of supplying them? Let no man inquire what may fairly be expected of him in this or that case, or what will comply with the ordinary rules of benevolence; but rather what he himself would look for, if he were in the place of the sufferer, and that sufferer did not possess the necessary means of relief. In estimating, however, the amount of assistance which ought to be bestowed in each case, every man is bound to consider other claims which may be made upon him; and so to proportion his

alms that he may, if possible, never be compelled to turn his back upon a suffering brother. But the parable teaches this truth, that in this estimate, not the individual sufferer, but his wants, must be considered; not the relation in which he stands, but the reality of the suffering laid upon him. Such is the spirit of the lesson of this parable. The only return for which any man may look, even where he has assisted his bitterest enemy, is the reward of conscience, and the satisfaction which arises from a practical love shown to others as fellow-members of Christ. The only recompence on which man can reckon is the sure hope that, as he has fulfilled the command of his Saviour to love his neighbour for his sake, so also that Saviour will extend mercy to him, and will, in his own good time, acknowledge him among those who have testified their love to himself by loving their brethren also.



THE RICH MAN'S GROUND.

LUKE xii. 16—21.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully : and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

THIS parable was suggested by the following circumstance, recorded in the narrative of the Evangelist. One of the company interrupted our Lord's address to the people by the request, 'Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.' Our Lord refuses to interfere, or to assume a judicial power to decide a question relating to matters of civil right. Such conduct would have been altogether foreign to his character and mission. He takes occasion, however, from this interruption to caution his hearers against the sin of covetousness, and to warn them of the folly and shortsightedness of an immoderate love of riches, however lawfully acquired. 'A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.' In other words, the true end and object of a man's life, his

preparation for that life which is to be hereafter, is not affected by the abundance of the things which he may happen to possess. In confirmation of this truth our Lord utters the parable, the moral of which will be found in the words with which he concludes his warning.

16. *The ground.* The estate, or farm.

20. *Thou Fool.* Senseless, and void of understanding that thou art. The same word is used in the same way by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 26.

Thy soul shall be required of thee. The literal translation of these words is rendered in the margin of our Bibles, 'This night do they require thy soul.' The original expresses that which in English would be expressed by the passive voice. Luke xvi. 9.

21. *So is he, &c.* In these words the moral of the parable is set forth. It is to be remarked that no charge is brought against the rich man of having acquired his wealth by unfair means; on the contrary, it had been increased by the spontaneous act of God, who had blessed with increase the fruits of the earth. Nor is any blame attached to him for the possession of these his many goods, nor for building larger storehouses, which were necessary for the increase which God had given him. His sin was that he laid up riches for himself; that he trusted in them, and placed in them all his hopes of comfort and enjoyment. He was not rich toward God. He did not consider the true use and application of that wealth with which he had been entrusted. He seemed to forget that God

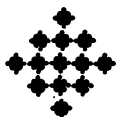
existed; and that to him was owing not his riches alone, but his very life, and the power of enjoying it. He lived for himself, and his own selfish ease; putting out of sight the account which was due to God of the use or abuse to which his gifts had been placed.

The application of the parable belongs to all classes. Riches and poverty are but comparative terms; and what is abundance to one man is little more than want in the eyes of another. Every man, therefore, be his worldly means great or small, who sets his heart upon money as the one object of supreme affection, because through it comfort and ease seem likely to be secured, to him the title, 'Thou fool,' is justly applicable. And every man who craves after those indulgences whereby the course of this life is made to run smooth, or is continually on the stretch to heighten the gratifications which money affords, is 'laying up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.' It is perfectly true that those to whom God has entrusted a large share of wealth are justified in living at a greater expense than those to whom little has been given. No one, whose worldly labours God has blessed, can be blamed for enjoying a corresponding degree of comfort. But whoever devotes much of anxious thought upon these comforts, or allows himself to be occupied in multiplying conveniences of living, forgetting, or at least putting into the background, the nobler uses of wealth, to such a man the warning in the parable applies. Wealth cannot be in any case increased without a corresponding

increase both of responsibility and temptation. He alone is rich towards God who, while he uses thankfully and with moderation for his own calm enjoyment the share of worldly goods bestowed upon him, keeps ever in mind this truth, that on his employment of the privilege thus entrusted to him will depend his portion of the true riches of God's kingdom. Wherever the affections have become deadened by love of ease,—wherever the continual gratification of selfish pleasures has put out of sight the truth that every man has brethren with whom he is bound to sympathize in word and deed—there no value will be set on the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And a further danger of the increase of riches, and of goods laid up for many years, is that men are thereby tempted to look upon this life as long, and certain, and safe; and to consider that the accidents and misfortunes of the world are so carefully provided against that they may 'take their ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' The result of such vain imaginations is to drive the heart and affections from God, and to set them on those perishable riches of earth which in a moment may be swept away for ever. It is easy to say, 'I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing,' merely because all things seem quiet, and fair, and prosperous; it is easy to wrap the soul in selfish indulgences, and to forget the high and heavenly calling of a Christian. The day is at hand when the riches of this world will be counted at their true value; and when those alone shall be rewarded

who have made their desire of earthly comforts second to the love of their Saviour, and of their brethren in Christ. To all such the message, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee,' will merely be a summons to the enjoyment of their riches; riches which are unchangeable, and will never take wings and fly away; riches unsearchable here, but of which the full value will be known in that day when men shall 'see God face to face, and know him even as they are known.'



THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

LUKE xiii. 6—9.

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

AT the beginning of the thirteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel we read that certain persons came and informed our Lord of some Galilæans, 'whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices;' that is, whom Pilate had ordered to be slain in the Temple at the very time when they were offering sacrifice there. It seems, from our Lord's remark upon this information, that those who told him of this horrible massacre concluded that these sufferers, from the extraordinary fate which befel them, had been guilty of some unusual sin. Our Lord emphatically denies the justice of this supposition, and takes occasion both to rebuke the uncharitable surmises of his informants, and to remind them that this calamity of the Galilæans was intended as a timely warning to themselves. 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' A similar example of sudden destruction is then introduced by our Lord himself, from which also he draws

the moral that events such as these had not so much an individual as a general application ; that the lesson to be learnt from them was not one that referred to the dead, but was to be made useful to the living, and that they were to be considered as warnings, and not as judgments. In the parable which immediately follows, God's judgments are represented as the certain consequence of impenitence, and as the effect, not of any particular or partial dealing, but of one general and comprehensive plan.

7. *Cumbereth.* The translation does not give the full force of the original, which means 'renders useless or fruitless.'

This parable had an immediate reference to the case of the Jewish nation, and was intended to represent their election to be God's peculiar people, his long-suffering towards them notwithstanding their repeated provocations, his gracious offers of pardon, and, above all, the earnest intercession of his Son in their behalf. The wilful rejection of these offers, and the continued refusal of these mercies on the part of the Jews, fully justified the dealings of God towards them in the overthrow of their Church and nation. It must not, however, be forgotten that, in the words of St. Paul, 'these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.' The warning is plain that there is a limit to God's offers of mercy and salvation, and that there is a time beyond which he will not delay to execute that

vengeance which he has declared to be the universal penalty of impenitence. This is true, not of individuals alone, but of churches also. Witness the fate of the seven churches of Asia, founded by the apostle St. Paul himself; witness the northern part of Africa, where, in the first centuries of the Christian era, the word of God flourished and had free course. And although the perpetuity of the Church at large is guaranteed by its divine Author, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her, yet particular branches of it may altogether cease, or may fall into fatal lethargy; like suckers from the root of a tree, or unfruitful limbs from the body of it, they may be lopped off as hurtful to the main stock, or allowed to remain dead and lifeless—a warning to others. The privileges vouchsafed to them will be taken away, and transferred to others, who will bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

The threat denounced against the Jewish nation by the Saviour, ‘Therefore I say unto you the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof,’ may be verified in other cases also. And as the religious faith and practice of any Church or nation is the aggregate faith and practice of the individuals who compose that body, it is the bounden duty of each single member to take care that he shows his sense of the spiritual privileges vouchsafed to himself and to his brethren. Let each be on his guard ‘to walk worthy of the light while they have the light, lest darkness come upon them.’ Let

each strive to glorify God within his own circle and sphere of action, and to abstain from all cause of offence to his brethren, that so he and they may be like 'trees planted by the water side, bringing forth their fruit in due season.' Let each, according to his several ability, by patient continuance in well doing, bear witness to the truth that the blessings of the Gospel, unless used and improved, may be altogether withdrawn. It is worse than useless to talk of the graces and perfections of the Church of Christ, unless these be evidenced by the consistent conduct of those who call themselves its members. God is indeed 'a righteous Judge, strong and patient;' but there is for each single individual a point beyond which his long-suffering will not be provoked. Each day that any one continues 'a hearer of the word and not a doer;' each moment that he professes to bring forth fruit worthy of his high calling in Christ Jesus, but remains barren and unfruitful, he is tempting God to withdraw from him that Spirit, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; apart from whom the soul of man is dead, and without whose graces brought forth abundantly no one will be accepted at the great tribunal of the Son of Man.



THE GREAT SUPPER.

LUKE xiv. 16—24.

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many : and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come ; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it : I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them : I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.

THIS parable must not be confounded with that of the Marriage of the King's Son, recorded by St. Matthew xxii. 2, (see page 54), although the two have some points of resemblance. They were spoken on different occasions ; the one given by St. Matthew was delivered in the temple ; that found in St. Luke's gospel was addressed to those with whom our Lord was eating bread at the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees. They were moreover spoken at different periods of our Lord's ministry.

The circumstances connected with the parable of

the Great Supper are as follows. One of those who sat at meat with the Saviour, hearing the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, was apparently forced to utter the exclamation, 'Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.' Nor does this remark seem to have been made through any feeling of scorn, or intentional hypocrisy. For, as our Lord had just before mentioned the recompence which would be rendered to the just at the resurrection, so this man, in a spirit, it would seem, of satisfaction at his own privileges as one of the children of Abraham, includes himself as certain to have his share of that recompence. In the parable therefore our Lord intended to expose the false security of those who are invited to the blessings of his spiritual kingdom, but who forfeit that invitation by an undue regard to earthly interests.

18. *A piece of ground*, or, as the word is elsewhere rendered in our version, 'a farm.'

19. *Five yoke of oxen*. Five pairs of oxen, intended to be yoked together for agricultural purposes.

To prove them. 'To make trial of them.'

21. *The halt*. 'The lame,' as the original word is in other passages translated.

23. *Compel them*. The same word is translated in Galat. vi. 12, 'constrain.' It has the meaning of earnest entreaty and pressure, but not of any actual compulsion.

24. *I say unto you, &c.* These words form part of the parable, and are supposed to be spoken by the

master of the feast, and are not the remarks of our Lord on his own narrative.

None of those men. The word 'those' in the original is an emphatic word, and refers to those others who had been invited, but had rejected the offer.

This parable is prophetic, and sets forth, at least in its direct application, the behaviour of the Jewish people with reference to those gracious offers made to them through the Son of God. The ground on which the children of Abraham rejected the teaching of the Saviour, and denied his claim to be the Messiah, was that Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed only a spiritual kingdom, and sought to exercise only a moral influence over them, whereas the Jews had set their hopes on a temporal dynasty, and an earthly prince of great power and majesty. The result was that though many of them were inclined to listen to the Saviour's words, and to acknowledge his power of working miracles, yet when they found their longings disappointed, and that they were invited only to repentance and self-denial, they were alarmed at the prospect of embracing his Gospel, and shrunk back within the limits to which their worldly aims and carnal expectations were confined.

The parable proceeds to foretell how, after the Gospel had been rejected by the Jews, the offer of its privileges would be made to the Gentiles. The alacrity with which the invitation would be received by the Gentiles is contrasted with the backwardness

and indifference with which it was treated by those to whom it was first made. The history of the early Church, as given in the Acts of the Apostles, records the fulfilment of the prophecy.

The dealings of God are, in their general scope, the same in all ages; to individuals, as well as to nations, there is 'with Him no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' And thus the parable teaches that worldly advantages, such as riches and pleasures, frequently prove a hindrance to the reception of the Gospel in the soul of man. For these have a tendency to make the things of time appear all-important; these engross the attention; these occupy the heart; these put on one side the prospect of eternity, and keep out of sight the real value of the riches of God's kingdom. Those who are rich, and easy, and comfortable, too often seem to think that they have nothing to do but to live respectably, and to enjoy themselves at their leisure; that if they devote any of their time, or wealth, or faculties, to God's service, they are conferring on him a great favour; that it is an act of condescension on their part to take an interest in spiritual matters, whether as concerning themselves or their brethren; they seem to fancy that they may excuse themselves from such service whenever they please; for that it is no slight patronage which they confer on the Gospel of Christ by attending to it at all.

God however is beholden to no man; he offers spiritual privileges to rich and poor as he sees good;

from both he expects in return the same willing, ready, and grateful service ; from both he demands the same active devotion of all that they have to himself, and the same humble acknowledgment of his favour and mercies. He can fill his household, the Church, with rich or with poor ; his glory is equally set forth by the obedience of the one or the other. When the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is ready, and the guests are summoned, the selection of them will be made according to rules which do not square with this world's estimate of worth. And, whoever may be invited to partake of that feast, certain it is that none who have treated the offers of God with supercilious scorn, or easy indifference, or proud neglect, will be permitted to taste of his supper.



THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY.

LUKE XV. 4—10.

And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

THESE parables may be fitly considered together, as they contain the same lesson. The parable of the Lost Sheep is also given by St. Matthew, chap. xviii. 12, 13, in words almost identical with those of St. Luke. In St. Matthew's Gospel our Lord had been charging his disciples 'not to despise one of the little ones; for the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.' And at the close of the parable he adds these words: 'Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.'

The occasion upon which both the parables, as re-

corded by St. Luke, were delivered, needs no explanation. The chapter begins, 'Then drew near unto Jesus all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.' Upon this our Lord spake the two parables which immediately follow, together with the explanation attached to each.

4. *In the wilderness.* Not a barren desert; but a wide, untilled plain covered with grass, adapted for the pasture of sheep. In St. Matthew's record of the parable the expression is 'in the mountains.' So we read, St. John vi. 10, that 'there was much grass in the place,' which is called by St. Matthew 'a desert place.'

7. *More than over ninety and nine just persons.* This expression is not to be taken as literally true, but as a mode of speaking adapted to the ordinary feelings and language of men, who are wont to exhibit greater joy at the recovery of that which they had supposed to be lost than in the long-continued possession of that which is safe. We cannot suppose that the angels are subject to excesses of joy or of grief such as occupy men, or that they actually regard the sinner who has been reclaimed from the error of his ways with greater favour than the believer who has walked steadfastly in the path of consistent obedience.

Who need no repentance. This does not mean that they are absolutely just and sinless. Such can no man be. The expression denotes that true and lasting change of heart and of habits attained by those who have already repented, and who therefore 'need no

repentance,' in the strict and literal meaning of the term.

The parable of the Lost Piece of Money needs no comment; but the simple lesson to be drawn from it, and from the parable of the Lost Sheep, as recorded both by St. Matthew and St. Luke, is shortly expressed in the Saviour's own words, 'Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.' In these words did he rebuke the uncharitable exclusiveness of the Scribes and Pharisees, and pointed out to them the wide difference between their murmurings and the anxious joy of the angels in heaven; between their sullen selfishness, and the cheerful sympathy of the heavenly host; between the chilling discontent of men, and the open-armed tenderness of God. No sinners have wandered so far from God but that He will follow them with his love, and rejoice over them when they are brought back. And in this joy the angels of God, those attendant spirits who execute his pleasure, and 'minister to them who are heirs of salvation,' readily share. They, who are members of the blessed family above, rejoice that a single soul has been rescued from the company of the devil and his angels; they, as loyal subjects of the heavenly kingdom, congratulate each other that a rebel has been won back from the ranks of the enemy unto allegiance to the King of Righteousness. In this they do but reflect their divine Master's joy. No spoil is so precious in his sight; no triumph so glorious; no victory so dear,

as the salvation of even one single soul, as the conversion of even one sinner from death unto life.

The application is plain that men should imitate the Saviour's holy love, and the unselfish joy of the angelic host, and do their part in restoring to the light of God's truth those, no matter how utterly lost and abandoned they may seem, who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death. The excuse is easily urged that with many men the case is so desperate that it will be labour in vain to seek to recover them from the paths of sin. It may seem a more hopeful task to establish in the faith those who are anxious to learn; to confirm the Christian virtues and Christian practice of those who are but 'babes in Christ,' and who earnestly desire to 'go on unto perfection.' This unquestionably is a needful and sacred duty, wheresoever a fair opportunity occurs. It must not, however, serve as a pretext for neglecting the wilful and reckless sinner, or for refusing to hold out to him the invitations and the promises, the loving calls and the earnest entreaties, with which the Gospel of the Saviour abounds. To be assured that even a single soul has been turned from sin to God, and been rescued from the tortuous track of disobedience into the paths of righteousness and peace, ought to be the most fervent cause of joy which the soul of man can conceive. To take a part in promoting this end is the most glorious work in which the energies of man can be engaged. For therein he labours for the same object which the Son of God came on earth

to accomplish; therein he secures the sympathy of the heavenly host who stand around the throne of the Most High. To be able on that day, when the bodies and souls of all men shall be summoned to their final doom, to point to even a single one of those who shall be placed on the right hand of the Judge, and to say, 'This soul was rescued from sin by my warnings—he was led to see the folly of his ways, and to understand the beauty of holiness, by my endeavours and timely cautions;' this will be indeed a source of thankfulness and joy—this will be a ground of hope that through the merits of the Saviour this sentence will be the award, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'



THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11—32.

And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and

all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

THIS parable, as it is the most beautiful of all our Lord's similitudes, so is it in its language most plain and free from difficulty. It follows immediately upon the two preceding parables—those of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Piece of Money, and arises therefore out of the circumstance, to which they also refer, that the Pharisees and scribes murmured at Jesus because he received sinners and ate with them.

12. *Goods.* Or, as the word literally means, 'property.'

Which falleth to me. 'Which belongeth to me as my share.'

He divided unto them his living. He made a division of his estate between the two sons.

13. *Riotous.* 'Dissolute,' 'prodigal,' as the force of the original is.

15. *To feed swine.* The forlorn condition of the prodigal is represented in a strong light, as the Jews looked upon swine as unclean.

16. *He would fain.* Rather, 'he was content;' that is, he was glad to be able to procure even such food as husks.

Husks. Supposed to be the fruit of the carob tree, which is still a common food of swine in the east.

17. *When he came to himself.* When he came to feel his own abject and lost condition. The words express his first conviction of his own wretchedness.

20. *He arose and came to his father.* It is to be remarked how the conviction of his mind wrought an almost immediate effect, and how his determination was followed up by prompt action.

When he was yet a great way off, &c. This verse marks forcibly the ready eagerness with which the father met the advances of his returning son.

22. *Bring forth the best robe, &c.* This is intended as a mark of the full and complete reconciliation between the father and son. Cf. Gen. xli. 42.

23. *The fatted calf.* Fatted or fed with corn. The use of the article denotes that this was the one single animal of the kind in the father's possession, and therefore the more valuable.

29. *Kid.* As contrasted with the fatted calf given to the younger brother.

30. *This thy son.* It is to be observed that he does not say 'this my brother;' thereby marking his unwillingness to join in the forgiveness of the father, and his displeasure that more honour had been shown to the prodigal than to himself.

31. *Son, thou art ever with me, &c.* In these words the father allows the truth of his elder son's remark, that for many years he had served him faithfully, and admits that, on this account, he had a fair right to be informed of the manner in which their common property was distributed. In the concluding verse, however, he sets before him the unloving and ungenerous spirit of his complaints, and vindicates his own merciful conduct towards the returning prodigal.

This parable seems to have a reference to the case of the Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles, after having been long far from God, returned at length to him through the Gospel, and God willingly received back his outcast children. The Jews, like the elder brother in the parable, were indignant at the thought of the Gentiles being admitted to the same rights and blessings as themselves, and refused to come into that Church, which was opened to the Gentiles also.

But this beautiful parable is for all times and ages of the world. It sets forth the sad course of sin, the first origin, happy progress, and blessed end of repentance in the soul of the converted sinner. It shows how discontent with that quiet peace which the service of God ensures, and a desire to be independent of the wholesome trammels which that service entails, will lead the man far away from his heavenly Father's home in search of pleasures and excitement, which may satisfy his perverse and evil cravings. Soon he grows reckless in his conduct, and squanders the talents entrusted to him in selfish indulgence or in riotous profligacy. Such conduct brings its own reward; and happy is he who, like the prodigal, after much painful suffering and well earned misery, at length comes to himself. Happy he who is at length convinced of the folly and wretchedness of his behaviour; who, by the grace of God working on his heart thus opened, feels his own base ingratitude in having forsaken his kind and merciful Father; who looks back at his past life with shame and dread, and earnestly

desires to amend his ways. Conviction such as this, duly improved, 'works a godly sorrow unto repentance not to be repented of;' not a mere temporary regret, but a real, deep, lasting grief—a grief not for the consequences and the penalty of sin, but for the sin itself, because he has disobeyed his long-suffering Father, because he has returned his Redeemer's love with ingratitude, because he has quenched the influence of the Holy Spirit. A sorrow such as this urges the penitent to the resolution that he 'will arise and go to his Father,' in full assurance that those who come to him that Father will by no means cast out. And the true penitent will go, not with sullen pride or forced humility, but in a deep consciousness of his own guilt, and with the hearty, overflowing confession, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' He will go to pour out his soul at the footstool of God's mercy seat, concealing nothing, extenuating nothing, laying open his whole heart, and trusting surely in the promise, 'If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' He will go to his offended Father, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life, with sincere and well-considered resolutions of amendment, and with a fixed determination never again to wander from that Father's home—that home in which alone there is peace, in which alone a refuge can be found, when the soul is wearied by the hollow joys and empty pretensions of the world.

And how does that Father receive the returning prodigal? 'While he is yet a great way off, the Father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.' What words can more adequately describe the readiness and the welcome with which God will receive a penitent, whenever He, who knoweth the heart, is satisfied that the sinner feels deeply the burden of his baptismal vows broken, of privileges despised, of mercies set at nought—whenever He, before whom all things are open, sees that the offender loathes his former sin, and has made steadfast and deep resolutions of amendment? It must not, however, be forgotten that repentance, however sincere or lasting, can never of itself merit pardon of sin from God. It is for the sake, and through the merits of Christ, and for these alone, because 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,' because 'the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin,' that the Father accepts a returning penitent. Repentance is indeed the *condition* of pardon; the death of Christ, and the reconciliation effected between God and man through that death, is the one sole yet sufficient ground by which pardon can be secured. All who return to him with a sincere repentance for their past sins, and with a hearty trust in the merits of the Saviour's sacrifice of himself, God has promised to accept with the open arms of his mercy—a mercy far more wide and comprehensive than the heart of man can conceive; a mercy which never grudges the restoration of spiritual privileges and blessings, even to those who

have forfeited, by the most wilful resistance, any shadow of a claim to the divine favour. This stretch of mercy, undeserved and boundless, the heart of men fails to comprehend—they expect justice to be more rigidly exercised; they, like the elder brother in the parable, at times take offence because mercy seems to prevail over judgment. But God's ways are not as man's ways. He knows that all his creatures, all without exception, require mercy at his hands, and that in strictness none would be able to stand before him. His pardon, therefore, he graciously measures, not according to men's several merits—for these, in all cases, are nothing,—but according to the riches of his love to men in his one well-beloved Son, and according to the reality of a sinner's repentance. In proportion as they trust in that love, and in the merits of that Saviour, and turn every one from his evil ways, so does he pour out the abundance of his mercy on them.



THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE xvi. 1—8.

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

THIS parable was delivered to our Lord's disciples. The particular occasion upon which it was spoken is not stated, nor does it seem to have any direct connexion with the preceding narrative.

1. *Steward.* The original implies a general manager of his master's property, and a superintendent of his household.

2. *Give an account of thy stewardship.* That is, render the statement and reckoning of the property which its master has a right to ask, and its steward is bound to give.

Thou mayest be no longer steward. According to the

force of the original, 'thou canst be no longer steward;' it is impossible that, with these grounds of complaint against thee, I can continue thee in my employ.

3. *I cannot dig.* Or, according to the original, 'I have not strength to dig.' Not having been brought up to hard labour, he was unable by such means to earn his livelihood.

4. *They may receive me.* They, that is, his Master's debtors, mentioned in the next verse, whom he intended to make his friends by the fraud detailed in verses 5—7.

6. *Measures.* The original words, both translated in v. 6, 7, by 'measures,' are different. The word which refers to the oil would be correctly rendered 'casks,' in Hebrew called 'baths.' The bath was a liquid measure containing between nine and ten gallons; and in Ezra vii. 22, is applied to both wine and oil. The word in v. 7 relating to wheat was a dry measure, and is found in 1 Kings v. 11, at which passage the Hebrew word 'cors' is given in the margin. The *cor* contained rather more than fourteen bushels.

Thy bill. The contract or bond entered into by the debtor, by which he acknowledged that a certain amount was due from himself to his master. This bond was probably in the steward's possession.

Quickly. No time was to be lost in making the alteration, as his master had given notice of his intention to remove the steward from his office.

8. *And the Lord . . . wisely.* These words are not the remark of our Saviour, but form part of the parable. 'The lord' means the master of the Steward.

Wisely, rather 'prudently.' His master commended the Steward, not for his dishonesty, (his character is sufficiently marked by his being called 'unjust,')—not that his conduct showed any real wisdom; but simply because he had been, in a worldly sense, prudent; because he had shown forethought; had looked forward to the time when he should be in want, and had framed his measures accordingly.

Children of this world—children of light. As these two expressions are obviously opposed to each other, we may understand by the first, the dark, crafty, double-minded character, whose affections are set on this world; by the second, that simple, candid, ingenuous, plain dealing, which marks those who walk by the light of divine truth. The expression 'children of' this world and of light is a Hebrew form of speaking, by which persons are called 'the children' or 'sons' of any quality or temper by which they are marked. So, in St John xvii. 12, Judas is styled the 'son of perdition;' in St. Mark iii. 17, James and John are called 'the sons of thunder;' and in Ephes. ii. 2, 3, we read of those who are 'the children of disobedience' and 'the children of wrath.'

Wiser in their generation. 'More prudent,' that is, not absolutely—not in the highest sense of prudence or forethought;—but only for their own generation; only so far as that is concerned; unto those worldly

interests and temporal ends, for which, so far as they are in themselves innocent, both the children of this world and the children of light are bound to make provision.

The words which have been just explained in the latter part of v. 8, 'for the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,' must be considered as part at least of the moral or lesson intended by our Lord to be drawn from this parable. The expression in v. 9, 'make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,' that is, of that wealth which is often employed for an unrighteous purpose, means that men are bound by the use to which they apply that wealth to make God their friend. He is the sole giver of that wealth; and thus, 'when they fail,' that is, when they die, they may be 'received into everlasting habitations.'

In drawing a practical lesson from this parable, care must be taken to look, not so much to the actual narrative, as to the object for which it was related. And this object seems to be to illustrate the truth that it is not only the duty, but also the manifest interest of a Christian, so to administer the trust of temporal wealth committed to him as to secure the good which is promised as a reward for a prudent and right exercise of it. Daily experience shows the dogged and resolute spirit in which 'the children of this world' set to work to make the most of the earthly means at their disposal; how they fix a purpose before them, and with steadfastness and con-

sistency carry it out; how they are willing to submit for a time to a loss, if they can but see their way to a prosperous issue hereafter; how they work out their schemes with boldness and perseverance, with diligence and activity; how every interest, how means and appliances of all kinds, are brought into play to secure the accomplishment of their plans. Meanwhile, of those who call themselves the children of light, how few imitate the example thus set them! how few consider on every occasion where they employ the wealth entrusted to them, whether by the particular use of it they are making friends which will secure them a place 'in everlasting habitations.' How few pause to reflect whether they are laying it out in such a way as God will approve, and on such objects as show that they have always before their eyes the truth that they are the stewards of his gifts. It must not indeed be supposed that merely by a right use of this trust men, of themselves, and without the merits of Christ, can conciliate God to be their friend, or expect that any merit will attach to a proper discharge of their duty. But the Saviour has been pleased to declare that certain acts done by men in faith to their brethren he will mercifully consider as done to himself. Let every one learn to imitate the children of this world in anxiety and care and watchfulness; and with steadfastness, and heartiness, and consistency of purpose, to promote the temporal and spiritual welfare of his brethren, who will thus become the channels by which he may

secure, through the merits of Christ, the love and favour of God. Let each man exercise real prudence ; and consider whether he has bestowed on objects such as these as much as he is bound to give, before he dares to think about superfluities for himself. Let each bear in mind that these, and not his own luxuries, have the first claim upon him ; and that he is a fool indeed, if he panders to his temporal wants, and neglects to secure those eternal interests which will be forfeited by all who shall be found unfaithful in the use of the worldly mammon committed to their trust.



THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE xvi. 19—31.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table : moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom : the rich man also died, and was buried ; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot ; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house : for I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

THE occasion of this parable seems to be as follows. —Our Lord had been delivering to his disciples the parable of the Unjust Steward ; (see sup., p. 107) ; and from the moral of it took occasion to remind them, verse 13, that God's servants cannot be faithful to him, if they endeavour to attend at the same time to His interests, and to those of mammon, or this world.

The Pharisees, 'who were covetous,' or as the original word literally means, 'lovers of money,' heard these words and derided him; that is, they expressed their contempt of his precepts by outward marks of scorn. Our Lord sharply rebukes them; telling them that though 'they justified themselves before men,' and maintained a fair outside which men might value, yet that which was 'highly esteemed among men was abomination in the sight of God,' who knoweth the heart. He then reminds them that, however much they might ridicule his teaching, yet ever since the days of John the Baptist, whom they, in some sort at least, had acknowledged, the Law and the Prophets, upon which they rested their righteousness, had given way to that kingdom of God, which he himself had been sent to proclaim, and into which all men were pressing to be admitted.

Notwithstanding, however, that the extension of His kingdom was his own peculiar mission, he did not intend to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but rather to fulfil them, and to give a higher tone, and a more spiritual application, to their precepts. Of this he gives an example in verse 18. Having thus defended himself against the ridicule of the Pharisees, our Lord returns to the subject which had called it forth; and in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus points out the terrible consequences of a selfish and luxurious life, such as is often led by the owners of wealth.

It has been much questioned whether our Lord grounds this parable on a real history, which might

have been well known at the time among his countrymen, or whether the circumstances are entirely fictitious. There seems, however, no sufficient reason for concluding that there was any real foundation for the narrative.

19. *There was a certain rich man, &c.* The term 'purple' marks the most expensive kind of dress. The dye of this colour, for the manufacture of which the cities of Tyre and Sidon were famous, was very costly, and was a sign of luxury both among the Greeks and Romans.

Fine Linen. The original word denotes a texture of linen, or rather of cotton, much of which was brought from India.

20, 21. *Lazarus.* This in the original means 'a helpless' or 'forsaken' person.

At his gate. Rather, at the range of pillars which enclosed the court of the rich man's house.

Desiring. The original implies that he would have been content to be fed with the crumbs—that he would have esteemed even this a great favour.

The dogs came and licked his sores. This fact seems to be introduced in order to show how utterly the poor man was neglected; that even the dogs, which are numerous in all Eastern countries, and run about in a half wild state (see Psalm lix. 14, 15,) were allowed to surround him, and to lick his sores.

22. *Carried by the angels.* As the angels are 'ministering spirits,' sent forth to minister to them who are heirs of salvation, they are here represented

as carrying the soul of Lazarus, who was one of those that 'die in the Lord,' to his resting-place.

Abraham's bosom. This is merely a figurative expression, by which, as is declared by Josephus the Jewish historian, the state of the blessed after death was commonly described. The phrase is derived from the Eastern custom of reclining at meals in such a way that the head of one guest almost lay in the bosom of the person next above him. Cf. St. John, xiii. 23.

Died and was buried. Of Lazarus it is only said that he died—of the rich man that 'he died and was buried'—thereby denoting that even after death the difference between the two was maintained, and that the pomp and splendour of the rich man followed him, as far as it could, even to his grave. Cf. Psalm xlix. 17.

23. *Hell.* The word here rendered 'hell' does not mean the place of eternal punishment reserved for the wicked: but the place of departed souls immediately after death, and before the resurrection of the body. It has the same meaning in the Creed. The original word and the translation imply literally a dark or covered place. We may remark that both the rich and poor man are represented as in the *same* place; which is, however, separated into two parts by an impassable gulf.

24. *Father Abraham.* The rich man is represented as clinging even after death to the title of a child of Abraham, on which many of the Jews rested their

hopes of salvation. Cf. Matthew iii. 9, and John xxxviii. 39.

Dip the tip of his finger, &c. The sufferings of the departed spirit, as well as the means which suggested themselves for his relief, are portrayed by a familiar description of bodily pain.

25. '*Son.*' As the rich man had addressed Abraham as his father, so Abraham now styles him 'son;' although no advantage is secured by this empty title.

Remember. This word suggests that the memory of talents misspent and gifts misused will press heavily on the spirits of the wicked, while awaiting their final doom.

26. *Gulf.* The original implies a vast open space, which separates two points.

Fixed. Made firm; grounded so that it cannot be moved.

27, 28. *Testify, &c.* Bear solemn witness to them from what he has seen of the certainty of the anguish which awaits them, unless they repent.

29. *Moses and the Prophets.* Under this term the whole of the older Scriptures is intended to be comprised.

30. *Repent.* The word here rendered 'repent' is the same which is usually employed on this subject in the New Testament, and denotes a thorough change of heart and disposition.

31. *Persuaded.* To turn, that is, from their evil ways, and amend their lives. It is important to call

to mind how this assertion was borne out in the case of the Pharisees themselves, who refused to believe the preaching of Jesus, as the true Messiah, notwithstanding that he raised Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, and others from the dead, and afterwards in his own person broke the bonds of the grave: the truth of which facts was well known to the Jews.

It must not be imagined that our Lord in the foregoing parable intended to teach that the rich would hereafter be punished simply because they are rich, or the poor rewarded because they are poor. In the character of the rich man is represented the case of one, to whom a large portion of this world's wealth had been entrusted, habitually withholding from his poorer brethren any share of those good things which had fallen to his lot, but appropriating them exclusively to himself and his own personal enjoyment. The parable teaches that a retributive justice awaits all such sinners, so soon as this world, on which they have fixed all their hopes, closes on them.

It must, however, be remembered that riches in themselves are no sin; danger arises from the misuse of them. Thus possessors of wealth not unfrequently shrink from even the mention of poverty: they cannot bear to be reminded that misery and distress exists; they get into the habit of considering all poor persons more or less unworthy of credit or respect: they wilfully shut their eyes to the truth that it is the ordinance of God that the poor shall never cease out of the earth, and they banish from their thoughts

every displeasing recollection that the fashion of this world passeth away. The only value of riches is the power to do good which they convey: they are rendered really useful to the possessor of them only when they are employed in the service of his brethren in Christ. And in proportion as riches increase, so do men, in many cases at least, the more set their heart upon them. The danger of a misuse of wealth is thus fearfully augmented. Nor does it matter what the particular extravagance be on which talents of this kind are misapplied, whether the pampering of the appetites as in the parable, or any other selfish enjoyment, either of an intellectual or bodily kind—all such are alike an abuse of God's gifts; all are alike a denial of the great Christian truths, that all are members one of another—and that for all such forgetfulness of himself God will assuredly bring man into judgment.



THE UNJUST JUDGE.

LUKE xviii. 1—8.

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

THIS parable is closely connected with the preceding narrative. Towards the end of chap. xvii. our Lord had been describing in very plain and forcible language the distress which should come upon the earth in the last times; when, to use his own words to his disciples, 'they should desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and should not see it.' Having warned his followers of the sufferings which were to come on the earth, and in which they were destined to bear their share, the Saviour proceeds to enforce in the parable which follows the urgent necessity of earnest and unwearied prayer—a parable, which was 'spoken to this end that men' 'ought always to pray and not to faint.'

2. *Neither regarded man.* Had no respect for the opinion or rights of men.

3. *Came to him.* The force of the original is, 'was in the habit of coming to him.'

Avenge me. That is, 'Give me justice at the hands of my adversary.' The widow is represented as merely asking for her rights, and not as seeking vengeance, in the common sense of the word.

My adversary. That is, according to the literal meaning, 'my opponent in a court of justice.'

4. *Said within himself.* That is, 'reasoned,' 'came to the conclusion.'

5. *Lest by her continual coming she weary me.* The word rendered 'weary' is in the original that which was applied to the wounds and bruises which boxers inflicted on each other. It is to be remarked that the mere power of selfishness is represented as forcing from the Unjust Judge what no sense of duty to God, no love to his neighbour, no regard for the opinion of the world, could extort from him.

7, 8, 9. *And the Lord said . . . faith on the earth.* These three verses are the words of our Lord himself to his disciples. And though they do not bear directly on the moral of the parable, yet as they are immediately connected with it, it may be well to suggest the application of them to what has gone before. This seems shortly as follows. Our Lord says, 'Hear what the Unjust Judge saith,' how even he, unjust, and wicked, and selfish though he was, at length listened to the widow who besought him thus importunately. And if he was thus moved, shall not the just Lord of all the earth listen to the prayers,

and avenge the cry of his own elect? God will most assuredly hearken unto their prayers, 'though he bear long with them,' though he seem to delay his answer a long time. He may be slack in avenging his people, as men count slackness; but in fact he will avenge them speedily; he will not suffer them to be tried for a moment longer than he knows to be for their good. 'Nevertheless,' adds our Lord, notwithstanding, that is, this speedy help which God will bring to his true servants, 'when the Son of Man cometh, will he find faith on the earth?'—will he, that is, then find among those who profess allegiance to him that faith which is evidenced by earnest and unwearied prayer?

The foregoing parable was spoken, as we are expressly told, to this end that the disciples 'ought always to pray and not to faint,' and this, with especial reference to the troublous times which our Lord had predicted. The lesson enjoined on them with this particular view is the same as that urged by St. Paul in more general terms, Eph. vi. 18, 'Pray always,' and again, 1 Thess. v. 17, 'Pray without ceasing.' By these expressions it is intended to remind Christians that, though they cannot always pray with the lips, yet the heart may be so affected with a sense of God's presence, and of the love due to him, that unbroken longing after him may become the regular tone of the mind. Thus men may acquire such a *habit of prayer* that they will

not grow weary in the frequent and regular performance of it, because their desires are not granted so soon as they expect. It must however be borne in mind that in the illustration here given of the duty of prayer the unrighteousness of the Judge is contrasted with the righteousness of God. The greater then the difficulty with which the Widow is represented to have gained her suit from the Judge, on account of his disregard of his obligations, so much greater confidence may be derived from the parable as to the success which, even in the most gloomy period, and even when God seems to hide his face, will attend steady, earnest, and importunate prayer.

The special inducements to this confidence which may be gathered from the parable seem to be as follows:—In the first place, the Judge is described as altogether reckless, as caring neither for God nor man; whereas the judgments of the Lord, to whom the prayers of Christians are addressed, are ‘righteous altogether,’ and ‘are done in truth and equity.’ The Widow came with fear and trembling; the character of the Judge afforded scarce a ray of hope that her petition would be listened to, although she merely came to demand justice. God, on the contrary, is not only perfectly just, but he is also ‘gracious and merciful, longsuffering, of great goodness,’ and hears those who have no right to demand justice, and who can only say, ‘Lord have mercy upon us.’ The Widow had no encouragement to continue to ask;

day by day, it may be supposed, she was driven by cold refusals from the tribunal before which she pleaded thus unceasingly; yet still, day by day, she ventured to return. The promise of the Saviour, on the other hand, expressly declares that 'if we ask, we shall have; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened to us;' we are encouraged to 'come boldly to the throne of Grace, for we shall find mercy and grace to help us in time of need.' The Widow could, in all probability, come before the Judge only at certain times and at certain places. God, on the contrary, 'dwelleth not in temples made with hands;' prayer at all times is equally acceptable to him who 'neither slumbereth nor sleepeth.' The Widow was poor, and therefore was despised. 'God is no respecter of persons;' to him 'the poor man crieth, and the Lord heareth him and delivereth him out of all his troubles.' Lastly, let it be remembered that the Widow is represented to have gained her desired suit without friend or assistance of any sort. Christians, on the contrary, 'have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who ever liveth to make intercession' for them. 'By him they have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him'—nay, without him, they have no confidence to be heard—for he is their mouth whereby they speak to the Father; he is their eye whereby they see the Father; he is their right hand whereby they offer themselves to the Father. In him are all the promises of God, Yea and Amen, confirmed and fulfilled: through him

and him alone is this gracious promise ratified, a promise conveyed in his own words, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he shall give it you.' 'Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.'



THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

LUKE xviii. 9—14.

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

THE occasion on which this parable was spoken is not stated by the Evangelist; but it seems as if it were connected with the preceding parable of the Unjust Judge. The object of that parable is to teach the duty of importunity and perseverance in prayer. This of the Pharisee and Publican points out the spirit and tone in which prayer must be uttered, if it hopes for acceptance with God. It is, as we are told, directed against 'certain,' some probably of his own disciples, 'which trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and despised others.'

10. *Two men.* It has been supposed by some that this is a real narrative; but it seems more consistent with our Lord's usual teaching to view the two cha-

racters here introduced as specimens of the class to which they respectively belonged.

Pharisee. The sect of the Pharisees is not mentioned in the Old Testament. It appears to have had its rise shortly after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity. Their name is derived from a Hebrew word signifying 'to separate.' They held themselves very much aloof from the rest of their countrymen, and prided themselves on their rigid observance of the Mosaical law, which, however, they 'made of none effect through their traditions.' The Pharisees were the most powerful of all the Jewish sects.

Publican. The publicans were the collectors of taxes for the Roman empire. These revenues were farmed by Roman citizens (usually persons of high rank), whose object naturally was to make as much gain as possible for themselves. They employed others under them in the different provinces of the empire, who were usually natives of the country, who also paid a certain fixed sum to their employers, and cleared what they could for themselves. In the execution of their duty they were for the most part not over scrupulous, and were often guilty of great extortion. Hence they were held in general dislike and contempt, and are in the New Testament constantly classed with 'sinners.'

11. *Prayed thus with himself.* That is, repeated over to himself the grounds on which he ventured to address God. It is to be remarked that the Pharisee

utters no *prayer*; he merely thanks God for his superiority over other men.

Extortioners—unjust. The first denotes those who take the property of others by open violence; the second, those who obtain it by secret fraud.

12. *All that I possess.* Rather, 'all that I gain.' The Pharisee meant to say that so strict was his compliance with the law of Moses, that even out of the least of his gains he rendered a tenth part to God.

13. *Standing afar off.* Not daring to approach beyond the precincts, or outer court, of the Temple.

God be merciful to me a sinner. Or, as it might be rendered, 'God be propitiated, be reconciled to me, who confess myself a sinner.' The original word seems to include the idea of some compensation or satisfaction having been offered to reconcile an offender with one who was estranged from him.

14. *Justified rather than the other.* This expression does not mean to imply that the publican was comparatively more justified in God's sight than the Pharisee, but that the one was absolutely accepted, while the other was rejected.

The moral of this parable is contained in the words with which our Lord concludes his discourse—'Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.' This is a general precept, enforced by our Lord in almost the very same words on several other occasions. Here it has a particular reference to the frame of mind in which the prayers of men must be addressed to God, if they are

to find acceptance at the throne of his grace. The lesson is plain that according as petitions are uttered in the self-satisfied and presumptuous spirit of the Pharisee, or in the humble, self-condemning temper of the publican, so in the one case will high thoughts be brought low, in the other self-abasement will in due time be exalted. The particular time and manner in which God will 'put down the mighty from their seats, and exalt the humble and meek,' will probably vary in different cases. With some men this result will be brought about during their probation upon earth; with others, not until the final recompense of each man shall be allotted. But this much is certain, that he who offers up his petitions to the throne of grace in the spirit of the Pharisee in the parable,—with no consciousness of any want, who boasts that he is 'rich, and has need of nothing,' when, in fact, he is 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,'—such a man cannot hope that God's ears will be open to his prayers. He, again, who is content with offering to the Most High thanksgiving which redounds more to the credit of the creature than to the honour and glory of the Creator, or who supposes that 'holy desires, good counsels, and just works,' can in any degree proceed from himself, or be perfected by his own unaided strength,—such a man must not be surprised if his addresses to God remain unanswered. He who presumes on his fancied deserts, and shuts his eyes to the evil which is in and about him; he who makes a boast of his own innocence, when he

ought to be humbling himself for his guilt; he who stands with unabashed effrontery in the presence of the Almighty, when he ought to be low on his knees before his footstool; the pride of such a man will surely have a fall. Above all, he who relies on his own good deeds, of whatsoever kind they may be, or fancies that his works and merits will secure acceptance with his judge, that man forgets, to his own imminent peril, the vital truth that in 'the sight of God shall no flesh be justified,' and that when 'we have done all that is required of us we are still unprofitable servants.' Prayer offered in any such spirit as this has no warrant from God to expect a favourable answer. And so he who, like the Pharisee in the parable, claims a right to be heard because the comparison between himself and his brethren seems to be in his own favour; he who measures his merits by the standard of the world, and forgets to contrast himself with the perfection of God; he who expresses self-satisfaction if he be able to acquit himself of flagrant violations of the rules of morality; such a man has never learnt the lesson that to the lowly and humble of heart alone is the promise made that he that asketh shall have, and he that seeketh shall find.

Acceptance of prayer is reserved for those who feel keenly the burden of their offences, whose first petition is ever for forgiveness, and who seek for that forgiveness not on any claims of their own to pardon, but through the One Atonement which reconciles earth with heaven. The strictest morality, the most exact

performance of religious duties, the most regular offering of devotion, will avail nothing unless based on a deep sense of man's need of pardon, and on the all-sufficient merits of Christ as alone able to wash away sin.



THE TEN PIECES OF MONEY.

LUKE xix. 12—27.

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapedst that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.

THIS parable is, in some of its details, very similar to that of the Talents (see page 65) as given by St. Matt. xxv. 14—30; but the two must not be confounded. The time and place of the delivery of each parable is different, that given by St. Matthew

having been uttered by our Lord after he had made his final entrance into Jerusalem, and while he was sitting on the Mount of Olives; that by St. Luke, while the Saviour was yet on his journey towards the holy city. Moreover the parable now under consideration is introduced by St. Luke with a special comment, wholly omitted by St. Matthew, explaining distinctly the object which our Lord had in view. In the 10th verse of the chapter Jesus concludes his address to Zacchæus with the words, 'The Son of man is come to seek and save that which is lost.' The Evangelist immediately continues, 'And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.' In these words is contained the object and aim of the parable, as will be seen in the conclusion of the narrative.

12 *Nobleman.* A man of noble or high birth.

To receive for himself a kingdom, and to return, There is here an allusion to a custom, not unfrequent among the kings who were tributaries of the Roman empire. In order to secure their claim to the kingdom to which they were legitimately entitled, they were wont to go to Rome, and obtain a confirmation of their rights from the emperor or other person in authority. Thus Herod the Great, before he took possession of Judæa, went to Rome to secure the good will of Antony; and his son Archelaus, in like manner, about the time of our Lord's birth, was confirmed in

part of his father's dominions by an interview at Rome with Cæsar Augustus.

13. *His ten servants.* 'Ten of his servants.' They are merely intended as a type of the rest, the number 'ten' having no peculiar meaning.

Ten pounds. 'Ten minæ,' or 'ten pounds' weight of silver.' The marginal note in the English Bible gives correctly the value of this sum according to the current price of that period.

Occupy. The force of the original is, 'Do business with,' 'Improve in trading.'

14. *His citizens.* The subjects over whom he was anxious to reign.

Sent a message after him. Rather 'an embassy.' This actually took place on the occasion of Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, going to Rome to secure the part of Judæa bequeathed to him by his father. The Jews sent an embassy to Augustus requesting him not to confer the kingdom on Archelaus, but without success.

We will not. i.e. 'We are not willing.'

16. *Gained.* Hath gained, in addition to the original one mina, ten minæ more.

20. *Napkin.* This word literally means a handkerchief with which to wipe off perspiration; hence a cloth, or napkin.

21. *Austere.* The original word is often applied to unripe fruit; hence it conveys the idea of 'sour,' 'harsh.'

22. *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.* By

your own admission and statement of my character. As you knew that I should be firm and just, even to severity, and that I should demand a strict account of the money intrusted to you, it would have been but common prudence on your part to have made the best use in your power of that money; nor have you a right to complain if you are condemned for your neglect.

23. *Gavest thou not my money into the bank.* Why did you not lend it to the Bank, who would have employed it for me, and from whom I might have demanded it back 'with usury,' or interest?

25. *And they said, 'Lord, he hath ten pounds.'* The sense of this observation, attributed to the bystanders in the parable, who are supposed to be witnesses of the command of the king to take the one mina from the unprofitable servant, and give it to him who had gained ten, is as follows: 'This man has already ten minæ—why give the one mina to him who even now possesses so much? why take from him who has but so little?' The answer to this remark is given in the following verse, which reminds the bystanders that every one who improves what he has shall have more given to him; while he who is careless about that which is committed to his trust shall forfeit all which has been bestowed on him.

26. *Those mine enemies.* Those citizens who sent the message after me, and were opposed to my promotion to the kingdom.

It is distinctly stated by the Evangelist that the

object of the parable was to counteract a prevailing notion among the disciples and followers of our Blessed Lord, to which his approach towards Jerusalem seems to have given rise, that he would at once set up his temporal kingdom, and reign as a prince upon earth. By the narrative, however, our Lord intimates that before his kingdom should be fully established he would depart from among those over whom he had authority; that some of these, the Jews for example, would set him at defiance; and that on such at his return, when he should come to 'put down all rule and all authority and power,' he would execute summary vengeance. At the same time, from *all* his servants, who during his absence had been entrusted with privileges and opportunities, he would require a strict and accurate account of the mode in which that trust had been performed. The intention then of our Lord in delivering this parable was to correct the impatience of his disciples, who seemed to expect that their Master would at once take open and undisputed possession of that kingdom which he had been sent to found.

The truth is set forth that in the meanwhile, and until the Lord shall return to receive his kingdom, each of the citizens of that kingdom, who profess allegiance to the authority of its Prince, will be placed in a state of trial, of probation;—to each of those who call themselves the servants of the Son of Man the execution of a certain definite trust will be committed, and on the performance of that trust will depend the

admission of each of those servants to the privileges of that kingdom which will be finally triumphant. Those who claim to be the servants and subjects of Christ, and yet neglect to improve to the best of their abilities the talents entrusted to them, must expect, whenever the Lord of the kingdom returns to take account of their work, to be classed among the wicked, and to share the fate reserved for his enemies. It is true indeed that he will not require the *same* improvement of faculties and talents from each one of his servants; from one He will look for an increase tenfold; in another case He will be satisfied with half that amount. The proportion demanded will depend on the opportunities vouchsafed to each; on his worldly condition, his bodily health, his early training, on the strength and variety of temptations to which he may be subjected, and many other circumstances on which He who knows the hearts of all men will decide with perfect equity. But He will acquit none who have wasted their opportunities of doing Him service; none who have failed to contribute their share towards the promotion of his kingdom upon earth; none who by their indifference to his interests and his supremacy have strengthened the hands of his enemies. To such as these the miserable excuse that his service was one, not of freedom, but of strictness and severity, and therefore that it was useless to attempt to satisfy its requirements, will be of no avail. So long as men call themselves the subjects of Christ, they are bound to be faithful to his laws; so long as they claim to be

his servants, they must labour heartily to promote his interests; so long as they profess to fight under his banner, they must wage war on his side heartily and with a good courage. 'The faith which worketh by love' will alone find acceptance with Him, who so loved us 'while we were yet sinners' as readily to lay down his life for us. In return for this sacrifice he looks for a willing acknowledgment of his rights, a hearty submission to his will, and a grateful devotion of body and soul to his service.

THE END.

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